



Woof Woof Story

I TOLD YOU TO TURN ME INTO A
Pampered Pooch.

NOT FENRIR!

4

Inumajin

ILLUSTRATION BY

Kochimo



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Story**

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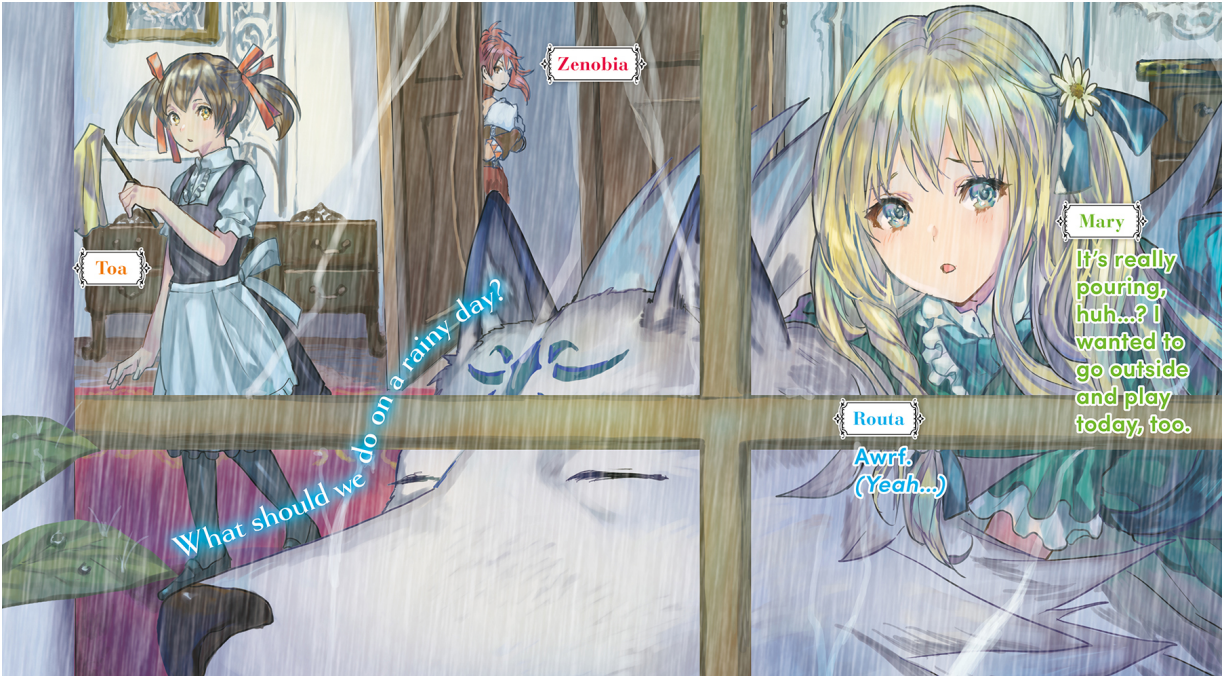
◆◆◆◆◆ Contents ◆◆◆◆◆

- 01 Here Comes the Rainy Season!
...Or So I Thought, but My Appetite Is **Endless!**
- 02 I'm Going on a **Diet!**
...Or So I Thought, but I Got Even Fatter!
- 03 Slimming Down in **Boot Camp!**
...Or So I Thought, but I Matured?!
- 04 A Family Vacation!
...Or So I Thought, but We Hooked **Something Huge!**
- 05 The **Demon Lord's Army** Returns with a Raid!
...Or So I Thought, but We're Fully Enjoying the Summer!
- 06 Real **Serious** Business!
...Or So I Thought, but That Would Never Happen!

EPILOGUE

AFTERWORD





Toa

Zenobia

Mary

It's really pouring, huh...? I wanted to go outside and play today, too.

Routa

Awf.
(Yeah...)

What should we do on a rainy day?





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NEW YORK

Copyright

Woof Woof Story

I TOLD YOU TO TURN ME INTO A *Pampered Pooch*, NOT FENRIR!

VOLUME 4

Inumajin

Translation by Andrew Prowse

Cover art by Kochimo

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

WANWAN MONOGATARI Volume 4 -KANEMOCHI NO INU NI
SHITETOWA ITTAGA, FENRIR NISHIROTOWA ITTENE!-

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Contents

[Cover](#)

[Insert](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[01: Here Comes the Rainy Season! ...Or So I Thought, but My Appetite Is Endless!](#)

[02: I'm Going on a Diet! ...Or So I Thought, but I Got Even Fatter!](#)

[03: Slimming Down in Boot Camp! ...Or So I Thought, but I Matured?!](#)

[04: A Family Vacation! ...Or So I Thought, but We Hooked Something Huge!](#)

[05: The Demon Lord's Army Returns with a Raid! ...Or So I Thought, but We're Fully Enjoying the Summer!](#)

[06: Real Serious Business! ...Or So I Thought, but That Would Never Happen!](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Yen Newsletter](#)

“It’s really pouring, huh...?”

“Arwf... (*Yeah...*) ”

Here I am, staring through the window at the scenery outside. The young lady, her face on my head, heaves a sigh of disappointment. Normally I’d be playing fetch or tag with her during our lunch break, but the weather today is pretty lousy.

“I really wanted to go out and play today...”

“Arwrwf... (*Ohhh, Lady Mary, please don’t take it out on me and muss up my chest fur...*) ”

The young lady pets me with an incredible degree of control as she hugs me from behind. I’m so frustrated—but the petting feels so fluffy and nice. *Twitch, twitch.*

The drizzle continues, obscuring the outside of the mansion in white. It’s too bad we can’t go outside, but I do love the smell of a rainy day. The mansion is surrounded by nature, causing a pleasant mix of the scents of the forest and earth to waft through the air.

“Arwf, arwf. (*Come to think of it, this is the first time it’s rained since I came to this mansion.*) ”

Maybe the climate here is just pleasant; it doesn’t get cloudy that often. Still, we aren’t exactly facing a water shortage, either, so this must be a good area to live in.

Apparently it's considered frontier land from the capital's perspective, but nobody comes to settle. There are no signs of cultivation here, despite the amazingly delicious vegetables from the old man's fields and the fertile land.

If you go really, really far south of the mansion, you'll see human villages here and there, but the excessively expansive forests to the north remain untouched by human hands. They were so pristine that the elves we were sheltering have gotten permission from Papa, the marquis of this frontier, to build a new village in it.

Well, if nobody's going near that forest, that works for me, as long as nothing gets in the way of my peaceful pet life. I can never let anyone know that monsters actually live in that peaceful forest—or that I've made friends with them.

If it gets out that I'm Fenrir, King of the Fen Wolves, I can kiss my pampered pooch days goodbye.

"Woof, woof. (Yeah, I definitely can't let that happen.)"

I made up my mind a long time ago. I vowed that I would abandon any and all combat potential and stick to being a mutt. I'm so cool.

"Routa, your hair is a little squishy right now," she says, dissatisfied, burying her face into my back.

"Woof? (Wait, really? Is it getting bushy?)"

Len pokes her face out of my mane. "Squeak. *(It is indeed damp. And altogether uncomfortable.)*"

Quit complaining. All you ever do is sleep. How about you try to stay awake for once?

"I know! Let's give you a good brush! That should fluff you right up!"

The young lady goes to get my personal brush.

"Woof, woof! (Oh boy, brush time! I looove a good brushing!)"

I didn't realize this when I was human, but getting your hair brushed feels really good. Using a hind leg to scratch behind my ear isn't bad, but this is nice in a different way. And if it's the young lady brushing me, it feels even better.

Lady Mary sits on the living room carpet and pats her lap.
“Okay, Routa, put your head right here.”

“Arwf! (*Yesss! Lady Mary’s lap pillow! Hype!*) ”

After I lay my head on her delicate thighs, the young lady immediately begins running the brush through my fur.

“Oh, wow! Routa, look, your hair’s coming off.”

“W-woof?! (*Wait, no way! Am I going bald?!*) ”

Without my fluff, won’t my cute factor get reduced by half?

“It must be shedding season. How fun! There’s so much coming off.”

Shedding season? Oh, right. I’m a dog. Even my fur goes through a replacement process, huh?

I’m a dog, after all! Just a dog! Everything’s fine!

“Wow, amazing. Look at these clumps coming out!”

What? No, if that much is falling out, then maybe I should be worrying. It’ll grow back, right? I’m not going bald, am I?

Given her smile, Lady Mary seems to be enjoying my hair loss a little too much as she brushes me.

“There we go. Next is your belly!”

“Woof. (*Okay.*) ” I roll over, begging.

“Does it feel good?”

“Woof, woof! (*This is the best!*) ”

Now that I’m on my back, I have a much better view of her face. She truly seems to be having fun, which means it’s more than worth it getting brushed.

“S-squeak. (*Do not turn over so quickly, beloved. You could have crushed me.*) ” Len climbs up to my belly.

“Squeak! (*Girl! My lord’s grooming should fall to me! Be grateful that I’ve magnanimously yielded this to you—*) ”

“Would you like me to brush you, too, little mouse? Just leave it to me!”

“S-squeak, squeeeeak! (*N-no, no, no! That isn’t what I meant! Ah—ahheee...!*) ”

Every time she challenges Lady Mary, the petting gets the better of her. Once she's under the brush, Len's resolve melts away like cotton candy.

Once Len lies limp in exhaustion, someone summons the young lady. "My lady, it is almost time for your studies," calls Miranda, the beautiful, bespectacled, neat-freak maid, with a bow.

"Aww, I was still brushing Routa... Boo..."

I second that boo. More free time for the young lady, please and thanks.

"I... Excuse me! If it pleases you, I can continue brushing him for you!"

The higher-pitched voice comes from Toa, who was waiting behind Miranda. Her black pigtails are bouncing around like usual. So cute.

"You would do that?! Thank you so much, Toa!"

"O-of course, it's no trouble at all!"

"I'll leave him to you, then! Okay, Routa, once my afternoon study session is over, let's play some more!"

"Arwf...! (*All right, work hard!*) "

Led by Miranda, Lady Mary leaves the living room.

Toa and I are the only ones left. Oh, I guess Len's still here in my tummy fur, too, in rapture.

"Um, okay, Routa, I'm starting!"

"A-arwf! (*R-right. Bring it on!*) "

With everything that's happened, Toa's gotten pretty used to me, but I can tell that she might still be a little scared. I can hear the tension in her voice, and it's making me nervous, too.

"D-don't bite me, okay?"

"Arwf, arwf. (*I won't bite. I'd never bite you.*) "

I do want to nibble on those pigtails, though.

"D-does it hurt?"

"Arwf. (*Not at all. You can be firmer if you want.*) "

Very timidly, Toa continues to pass the brush through my fur. The sound of the rain outside and the pleasant feeling of

the brush prove to be a lethal combo, and I start nodding off.

“Ah-ha, Toa’s slacking off!”

“Arwf? (*Hmm? Who’s there?*) ”

I open my eyes to see three maids surrounding us.

“I—I am *not* slacking off! I’m in the middle of a very important task given to me by the young lady!”

“Relax, I’m only kidding. You’re so serious, Toa.”

With a shrill laugh, the short-haired maid squats down in front of me.

Urgh—a little more, and I could see...

From behind her, the two other maids look down at me with keen interest. Now that I think about it, I’ve been at the mansion for a pretty long time, but I still don’t have the names and faces of all the servants down. I mean, playing with the young lady and eating food with the old man are generally the only things I ever do. I’ve had no interaction with the other maids, who are always busy at work.

I figured the maids were a little scared of me after I got ginormous so quickly, but ever since I became friends with Toa—the one who was the *most* skittish around me—the attitudes of the others have softened up, too.

“Hello, Routa. I guess this is our first time meeting. My name’s Betty.”

“And I’m Connie.”

“...I’m Mira.”

The short, red-haired one is Betty. She has cute freckles and seems lively.

The one with the fluffy gray hair is Connie. She has kind, downward-sloping eyes, and she gives off a soothing aura.

Mira is the one with the long black hair. She’s beautiful, but the absence of expression on her face is distinctly doll-like.

I see them a lot while they’re cleaning the mansion and doing other stuff, but this is the first time they’ve ever spoken to me.

“You were so scared of him before. But now you can touch him, huh?”

“I-I wasn’t—I wasn’t scared!”

“...You definitely were.”

“Yes, you were indeed.”



“Hrnng...”

Toa groans, at a loss. Though she puts up an argument, pigtails bobbing all the while, she’s no match for the three of them.

Listen here, ladies. I’m the only one who’s allowed to tease Toa. If you want my permission, you’ll have to pet me first. Now come feel how fluffy this fur is.

I roll over in front of the trio of maids.

“Sorry, sorry. It’s just that we’re not busy right now, so we thought we’d help you brush him.”

The three have brushes gripped in their hands. This must have been their plan all along.

“Th-thank you!”

“Don’t worry about it!”

“The more hands we have, the faster it will go.”

“...It may take a while because of his size.”

Yep. Because I’m so big, giving me a thorough brushing is no walk in the park.

All right, I’ll take you all on at once.

Each of the four maids around me starts brushing her chosen spot. Their movements are slow and deliberate. I’d expect nothing less from the maids of this mansion.

Well, except for Toa.

“Hrnng... You’re all so good at this...”

Don’t worry too much about it. Your unsteady brushwork feels plenty good in its own right.

“Oh, right. Would you like some of these? They’re treats sent from the family house.”

“Arwf! (*What? Yes, please!*) ”

Meat isn’t the only thing I love! Sweets are right up my alley.

I crunch into the cookies the redheaded Betty gave me.

“And I have something of my own for you.”

A muffin, huh? This tastes great, too! It’s so soft and fluffy.

“...Have this.”

A pretzel! It's crunchy, with the perfect amount of salt! Amazing!

"H-hey, we shouldn't be feeding him outside of his regular meals without asking. Especially not people food."

"Oh, it's fine. Even chef James was laughing about how he would eat anything and everything. And I'm sure he'll finish his meals just fine. Right?"

"Arwf, arwf! *(Right! Hell could freeze over and I'd still eat everything the old man gave me.)*"

"Oh...", mutters Toa. "I'm, um, sorry, Routa. I don't have anything for you..."

"Arwf! *(It's fine!)*"

In exchange, please let me nibble on those pigtails.

But seriously, I have all these pretty maids surrounding me, giving me free snacks and taking care of me... Is this heaven?

I can't get enough of this pampered pooch life!



"Wow, look at how much came off!"

"It's quite the heap. And yet he doesn't look different at all, even though he lost so much hair from the brushing."

"...So fluffy."

With the brushing over, the maids are now holding piles of white hair in their hands. You could probably make another me out of all that fur.

"Arwf... *(Phew... That was refreshing. It could just be my imagination, but I feel lighter.)*"

I stand up and check out my newly brushed body.

The rainy weather made my fur all clumpy, but now I'm nice and fluffy again. Despite losing all that fur, I'm even more of a pillow than before.

"Wow!" says Betty. "You really are huge, huh? Your legs are so long that when you stand up, you're even taller than

me."

"A-arwf! (*N-no, I'm not!*) "

I'm still an adorable puppy. I'm only a few months old, y'know.

Just to be safe, I lie back down.

"Um, thank you all so much, everyone!"

"Woof, woof! (*Thanks a ton!*) "

Toa and I thank the other maids together. Well, they probably didn't understand anything I said. But at times like this, all that matters is that my feelings were conveyed.

"Don't worry about it!"

"It was very fun. I hope you'll allow us to brush him again."

"...So fluffy."

"That's all you've been saying for a while, Mira."

"Let's be off. That was a fun break, but it's time to get back to work."

"...So fluffy."

Mira is reluctant to leave, so Betty and Connie end up dragging her away.

Heh. Another one has fallen victim to my fluffy charm.

"Routa, I have to go, too."

"Woof! (*See you later!*) "

After putting the brush away, Toa leaves the room.

Now that I feel refreshed, I could take a morning nap, but I'm not sleepy yet. It's still raining, so I can't go outside. Maybe I'll use this chance to explore the mansion.

"Squeak. (*Phew, they've finally gone. My word...*) "

Len, who was hiding in my fur throughout the entire brushing session, pokes her head out.

"Arwf. (*You were trying to escape the brush so much that you were tickling me to no end.*) "

"Squeak, squeak. (*Hmph. You are the stranger one, beloved, for allowing mere humans to lay hands upon you with such familiarity.*) "

"Arwf. (You say that, but you were feeling pretty good there yourself.) "

Heh-heh. The body doesn't lie.

"S-squeak! (That is wholly untrue! A-although perhaps it would be all right to allow it once in a while!) "

"Arwf, arwf. (Uh-huh, sure. Another refreshing tsundere response.) "

I rise, and, with Len on my head, I leave the living room.

"Arwf? (Huh? This doorway's a little tight.) "

When I try to pass through, my body gets caught a little. Were the mansion's doorways always this narrow? With my body rubbing against it, the hair they spent all that time brushing and fluffing up might get flattened back down.

"Arwf, arwf. (Well, whatever. Where should I start my exploration?) "

I've seen most of the first floor already, so I'll head to the second. I only ever come to the second floor to visit Papa in his study. It looks like the guest rooms and such are on the second floor, too.

"Arwf! (That gives me an idea! Maybe I'll go to Zenobia's room.) "

She's always the one challenging me, after all; I've never been the one to approach her. I think I'll go give her a little scare. I'll just barge into my favorite freeloader's room and have some fun before dinner. Even though it's still daytime.

Trotting across the long carpet laid atop marble, I come to the great hall. I take the large staircase nearby up to the second floor, then look to either side.

"Arwf... (Let's see if I can pick up Zenobia's scent...) "

My Fenrir—er, my *dog* body sure comes in handy at times like this.

"Arwf. (Got it. This one.) "

Zenobia's room is the farthest one in the second floor's east wing.

"Woof, woof! (Zenobiaaaa! Open uuup!) " I call out from outside the door before hearing a flurried pattering from

inside. "A-arwf? (*Huh? What's happening?*) "

As I stand there in surprise, the door opens a crack and Zenobia peeks out.

"O-oh, it's you," she says. "Did you need something?"

"Arwf, arwf! (*Let's go play, Zenobia! But no trying out new swords.*) "

"....." Zenobia pokes her head out of the door and looks around. After confirming nobody else is in the hallway, she opens the door for me. "...I don't know what you want, but if you want to come in, you may."

"Arwf! (*Yes!*) "

I slide my body through and enter Zenobia's room.

"Arwf... (*Whoa...*) "

Her room isn't exactly what I'd call girly, though I should have expected as much. Unlike in Lady Mary's room, with its wafting floral aromas, my nose picks up more barbaric odors: iron and oil.

I'm smelling the swords hanging on a nearby wall. How many does she *have* ? Even an arms dealer's jaw would be on the floor if they saw this collection. She's already broken so many over my head. I didn't think she still had this many left...

Zenobia used to be an amazingly talented adventurer, and you'd think she'd have a lot of money, but she never gives the impression of being rich. Is it because she poured all her earnings into swords...?

Besides the weapons, the room only has a bed, a closet, and a desk, which holds tools for weapon maintenance. The level of femininity in this room is pretty low.

"What is it? You're spending an awfully long time staring at the wall. Could it be that you, too, understand the inherent value in swords?"

"Arwf! (*Of course not!*) "

In fact, my distaste for swords has been rapidly increasing with every one you swing at me. My boyish love for deadly weapons now lies dead in a grave.

"I see, I see. Then I'll tell you stories about these swords today. Each of them has a glorious origin."

Zenobia happily begins selecting swords from the wall.

"Arwf... *(It sucks not being able to communicate...)* "

Well, those who understand my words but *still* can't pick up on what I'm saying—like the Fen Wolves—are just as much of a pain. I keep telling them I'm a pet dog, not Fenrir, but they won't listen to me.

"Oh, that's right. Would you like to snack on this while listening to my story?"

Zenobia produces a wrapped bundle from the bag in the corner of the room.

"Rations from my adventurer days. I brought it because I felt bad getting rid of it, but it's about time I do something with it. It'll start to mold when it gets humid," she says, opening the wrapping, revealing the blackish mass within.

What is that?

Rations remind me of the adventurers who came to the forest on an investigation. They were eating this claylike stuff, acting like it was awful.

"Sniff, sniff. *(Hmm, hmm. Well, it doesn't smell strange or anything.)* "

"Wait a moment."

Zenobia places a hand on the sword at her hip before cutting the block of rations into thin slices, all in the blink of an eye.

"Arwf! *(Whoa! I couldn't even see her hands move.)* "

Even with the eyes of Fenrir, too—I didn't even see her put the sword away. I heard only the ring of the handguard as she sheathed her weapon. She really is something. As long as she has a proper sword, she can actually land a hit on Len.

"Arwf? *(Wait, is this meat?)* "

The sliced provisions are faintly red, and the scents of spices and meat gently waft into my nostrils.

"I made these myself, so they aren't much compared to Lord James's smoked meats, but..."

Zenobia's handmade food? I don't care what it is, I *need* to eat it.

She pinches a thin slice of meat and holds it out for me to wolf down.

"Arwf! (*This is beef jerky!*) "

The sweet-and-salty meat, the sharp, spicy aroma—I can't get enough of it. In fact, it's so spicy that I start to want some sake.

"Squeak! (*Share some with me, as well!*) "

Oh, give me a break. The freeloaders around here are all gluttons.

I toss a piece of the dried meat in my mouth up to Len, who is perched on my head.

"Squeak, squeak. (*Oh. This isn't bad. It's a different flavor than smoked meats have, with their gentle, smoky scent. This firmness, this spice... It's quite addictive...*) "

Len munches on the dried meat in pure bliss. Man, she's been losing her wild nature pretty quickly. It's getting hard to believe she's actually a giant, terrifying blue dragon. She's slipping into the role of a pet pretty smoothly.

"...I've been seeing that mouse around a lot lately. Friend of yours?"

"Arwf? (*Oh, yeah, well. Just don't look at her too closely, okay?*) "

Zenobia's the only one in the mansion who doesn't wear rose-colored glasses. If she stares long enough, she might realize who Len really is.

"...Mrgh. I wonder why staring at it fills me with this innate sense of fear... The color of its fur is familiar, too. I feel like I've seen it somewhere before..."

Wait—oh no, oh no! She's already onto her.

"Squeak. (*Hmph. You did well to damage my jeweled scales back then. Still, I am not the type to hold grudges. I shall forget about that in exchange for this meat.*) "

After getting off her high horse, Len ignores Zenobia and chomps into the dried meat.

I'm begging you. *Please* treat the fact that your identity is under suspicion with a little more caution. If our peaceful pet life ends, we won't be able to eat this delicious food anymore.

"This odd sense of intimidation... Could this mouse be another monster?"

"Arwf?! (*Crap, did she figure it out?!*) "

You're not wrong, but hold on! She's totally harmless! I promise, she won't hurt you!

"S-squeak, squeak, squeak?! (*Wh-wh-wh-wh-what? Y-y-y-you want to fight? I warn you, I shall show no mercy...!*) "

Frightened, Len scrambles to get her short limbs into a kenpō stance. The fact that Zenobia once hurt her seems to have been sufficiently traumatic.

"Ah! Yes, suspicious indeed...!"

"Arwf, arwf! (*No! She's not suspicious at all!*) "

As she directs a dubious stare at me, I lower my head and inch away from her.

Oops. The bed's behind me. Nowhere to run!

Just then, my tail, wagging uneasily, strikes the pillow on the bed. The impact bounces the pillow down to the floor.

"Arwf. (*Oh, excuse me.*) "

Then I notice that something was hidden underneath the pillow.

"Arwf? (*What's this?*) "

It's a white, fluffy, pom-pom-looking thing.

"Arwf... (*Is this...a stuffed animal?*) "

It's a little yellowed and worn from use, but it appears to be a stuffed dog. It kinda looks like me, actually. But maybe it's my imagination.

"Th-th-th-that's, um... It's not what you think!"

In a fluster, Zenobia jumps over and sweeps up the stuffed animal, hugging it to hide it behind her arms.

“This is... When I went to buy a sword in the capital, this had been left out in the item shop next door! The poor thing had become faded in the sun and was the only one unsold...! I certainly did not buy it because I thought it looked like you!”

“Arwf. *(You know, nobody asked about that.)* ”

Still, Zenobia has a stuffed animal? I guess she does have a cute side to her.

I was worried that her room full of swords would be bleak all the way through, but I guess it has at least one properly feminine aspect.

Actually, Zenobia denied it, but the stuffed animal clearly looks like me.

“Aaarwf? *(Zenobiaaaa? What sort of games are you playing with it every day? Do you talk to it and have it ‘reply’ to you in a high-pitched voice?)* ”

“Wh-why are you looking at me like that?! I have nothing to be guilty about!”



This way she has of getting flustered—she’s definitely giving it a good-night kiss every night and greeting it when she wakes up in the morning. As I stare at her, a secret smile behind my eyes, her face rapidly reddens. Finally she looks down and starts trembling.

“Get... Get... Get...”

“Arwf? (*‘Get’?*) ”

“*Get ooouuuttttt!!*”

“A-arwf?! (*I-I’m terribly sorry for the intrusion!!*) ”

Stricken by Zenobia’s thunderous roar, I frantically scramble out of the room. *With* the rest of the jerky.

“Arwf... (*Hoo, that was scary. Guess I teased her too much. It distracted her from Len, so all’s well that ends well, but still...*) ”

After bidding farewell to the teary-eyed, stuffed animal-clutching Zenobia, Len and I decide to continue our exploration elsewhere.

All right, now then. Where should I go next? I toss the remaining pieces of jerky into the air and scarf it down all at once.

“Munch, munch. (*Whenever I eat dried stuff, it makes me really want alcohol. The strong kind.*) ”

Oh, that’s right. Papa’s study is right over there. I’ll go play with him, and in exchange for letting him pet me, I’ll get him to give me some alcohol.

Mwa-ha-ha! Don’t have to worry about drinking during the day. I can have as much as I want of the highest-quality stuff without anyone telling me not to. “The absolute best” is the only way I can describe being a pet to rich people.

“Aaarwf, aarwf, aarwf! (*Paaapaaa, lettt meee iiiiin!*) ”

Three doors away from Zenobia’s room is Papa’s study. I call out to him from outside his door.

“Squeak. (*This is starting to feel less like exploring the mansion and more like going around pestering people for food.*) ”

Business as usual. No problems. What kind of pet would I be if I refused what they practically threw at me?

"Squeak. (If you want someone thrown at you, I'm still here. Won't you have a taste already?) "

"Woof. (That's strange. I can't hear you.) "

I flat-out ignore Len's advances, as usual.

"...Arwf? (...Huh? That's weird.) "

Normally he opens the door right away, but today it's taking a while. I wonder if he's engrossed in work.

"...Please, give me the truth, Dr. Hecate!"

"Hmm, I don't know..."

I hear talking from inside the room. Judging by the words, Hecate must be here, too. I can hear their voices through the door.

"Please don't tantalize me like this! How does it look, Doctor?! What are the symptoms?! Could it be getting worse?!"

"Arwf...? (S-symptoms...?) "

Papa's grave voice startles me. The only person around here who's gotten sick recently is the young lady. She was looking real bad at the time and had a very high fever, but the herbs I brought back should have cured her.

"Arwf...?! (Wait, has Lady Mary's illness come back...?!) "

I use my front paw to open the door and jump into the study.

"Woof, woof! (Papa! Is it true the young lady's illness has gotten worse?!) "

In the study are Hecate, sitting on the sofa with her legs crossed, and Papa, leaning over his desk toward her.

"Dr. Hecate! Please tell me!"

"Arwf, arwf! (Yeah, yeah! Spit it out!) "

"...Should I? It may come as a shock..."

"It doesn't matter! You teasing me like this is much worse for my heart!"

"Woof, woof! (Yeah, yeah! Quit acting all high and mighty!)"

"Dr. Hecate, how does it look?!"

"Woof?! (*How does it look?!*) "

"Has my urine gotten any more acidic?!"

"Arwf, arwf? (*Has Papa's ur— ...I'm sorry, what?*) "

You mean this wasn't about Lady Mary's illness?

"Well, to put it modestly, the graph is trending upward."

"Guh, graaaahhhh...!" Papa reels backward, looking like he just saw the end of the world.

"Arwf... (*Come on... All this for the acidity of Papa's pee?*)
"

I couldn't possibly care less about this. I thought for sure my lady had relapsed into fever. Papa, this is because you drink too much all the time, isn't it? Should I drink your share of booze every day instead?

"Yes, so you need to change your lifestyle habits first. I've told you before, very clearly, to stop drinking, haven't I?"

"I can't! My evening drink is the highlight of my day! Isn't there anything else you can do...?!"

"There is medicine, but if I give it to you, you'd probably only use it as an excuse to start drinking even more."

Playing with the vial she has taken out of her cleavage, Hecate casts a dubious look at Papa.

"I will not drink more...! I promise, I will not!"

Papa crying and clinging to her is seriously lame. He's always so nice and mild-mannered. The difference is staggering.

"...I just don't know what to do with you. All that self-control can increase the production of uric acid, too, and you *do* have the pressure of your job to consider. I'll prescribe you this medicine in the faith that you won't consume any more alcohol than you already do."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much!"

As Papa lowers his head in thanks, Hecate recrosses her legs. Her smile is too sweet for words. There's nothing in the world scarier than Hecate when she makes that sort of face.

"As for the price... The amber wine you got yesterday will do nicely. You got a bottle of Serenhorn, aged eighty years, didn't you?"

"?! H-h-h-how do you know about that?!"

"I know everything about any booze that arrives at this mansion. And you were going to enjoy such fine alcohol without telling me? You've been a bad boy, Gandolf. Were you trying to cancel out your medicinally lowered uric acid level with that delicious wine?"

"N-no, never! I wasn't intending to drink it all in one day. I wanted to enjoy it little by little..."

Papa's face pales and he starts trembling beneath Hecate's smile.

Oh well. Guess I'll help him out already.

"Arwf, arwf. *(All right, all right. Could you leave it at that, Hecate?)* "

"Oh, hello, Routa... Routa? You seem to have gotten, well, rather more well-rounded since I saw you last."

"Arwf? *(Huh? Really? Am I an even better pet now?)* "

"Hmm... Well, I think you've gotten rounder and cuter..."

"Arwf! *(Right? The young lady tells me the same thing!)* "

Being a little rounder must be taking some of the scary factor away and making me cuter.

"Arwf, arwf. *(That aside, please don't tease Papa too much. For his sake.)* "

"What a loyal pet you are. But if you really have Gandolf's best interests at heart, you might want to convince him to stop drinking. Amber wine has a very high alcohol content, which isn't good for him. Perhaps drinking it *for* him, in his place, would be the kindest thing to do."

"Arwf. *(Hmm, you have a point... No, you have an entire argument.)* "

"R-Routa?!"

I know he doesn't understand what I said, but he must be able to tell from my attitude, because he looks at me as though he's been betrayed.

Sorry, Papa. To be honest, I want to try this rare booze from eighty years ago, too.

"In that case, why don't we drink it right now?"

"Arrrwf! *(Oh boy, oh boy! Boozing it up in the middle of the day is the best!)* "

Hecate waggles a finger, and a wine bottle with a gorgeous label falls out of the air. Apparently she's already figured out where Papa hides his booze.

"Dr... Dr. Hecate, I still have work to do..."

"Oh, it's fine. We'll wait until you're finished with it. While we drink."

"Arwf! *(We'll wait, we'll wait! While we drink.)* "

Do your best, Papa. If you can get your work done quickly, there might be a mouthful of it left. Maybe.

"Ngh, oohhhhhhhh...!"

Papa plants himself at his desk and his pen begins flying over his documents at a breakneck pace.

"Here's some for you, too, Routa."

"Arwf! *(Hooray! Thanks!)* "

The amber color pours into the elaborately designed glass. I adore the glug-glug-glug sound coming from the bottle.

"Arwf! *(Wow, that's a really deep color!)* "

Although the liquid is a rich amber color, it isn't cloudy. It's extremely clear. Is this the kind of beautiful color an eighty-year aging process can produce?

Also, there's a tantalizing aroma wafting from it. A fragrant, almond scent mixed with a subtle hint of flowers in an intricate dance—my nose has never sniffed anything so mouthwatering.

I expect something several grades higher than the amber liquor he's let me drink in the past.

After taking in a lungful of the aroma, I decide to drink right away.

"Lick, lick. *(Whoa! This is amazing...)* "

I don't feel the sting of alcohol on my tongue even slightly—nothing more than a slightly soft heat spreading through my mouth. The many years of aging have taken the alcoholic bite away, making it all so smooth.

"Arwrwrw... (Best stuff I've ever had...) "

The mellow flavor is like completely ripened fruit sliding down my throat.

Well, damn. This isn't just delicious. You could buy an entire *house* for the price of this stuff.

"Oh, my! It really is amazing. I could drink this all day."

Hecate is enjoying the amber liquor, too, using an adorable tasting glass.

"Arwf! Arwf! (More, please! More, please!) "

"Oh, well, here you go."

No need to worry about uric acid levels with my Fenrir body. I can drink as much as I want.

"Dr. Hecate! Is there any left?!" asks Papa without taking his eyes off the papers as he furiously stamps them.

Hecate wiggles the bottle of amber-colored alcohol and narrows her eyes to check the contents. "You'll be fiine. There's still half...of half of it left."

"It's that empty already?!"

"Oh my, but the liquor on this shelf is delicious, too. Perhaps I'll go ahead and open this one."

"Arwf! (All right!) "

"Hnnnnngggggggggghhhhh!"

As Papa cries and finishes his paperwork, we float dreamily away on a cloud of intoxication. Ahh, what a wonderful drink.



"Hoo boy. You reek of alcohol. Don't tell me you started drinking while the sun was still up."

"Arwf! (Old man, dinner! Dinner, please!) "

Amazingly enough, after drinking alcohol, you get hungry. Wowie. Who would've guessed?

Which is why I've come to the kitchen for an early dinner.

"Ah, it's Routa! Drinking before dinner, are we? Must be nice!"

Oh? The lady peeling potatoes over there looks like... Ah, it's Betty. The short-haired maid straddles a chair as she skillfully glides her knife across the potatoes.

"And you've done enough now, Betty. Get some rest. Your scrupulous work is always a big help."

"Heh-heh! Don't mention it. After all, I'm hoping for some freebies as a reward, chef."

"You sure are a cheeky one. I'll bring you some later, so relax and look forward to it."

"All right!" Betty jumps and pumps her fist, then skips out of the kitchen.

She seems like a—how do I put this—a shrewd girl. She comes off as a mischievous tomboy, but I've never seen her getting scolded by anyone. Which means she must be the reliable type—one who can handle things without making mistakes when the chips are down.

"Ah, you wanted food as well, Routa. Well, you're in for a treat. Toa shared a very interesting ingredient with me today. She said it was sent from her homeland."

Really? Toa did that? I appreciate it.

Ingredients from her homeland... Where *is* she from, anyway? She has black hair and gives off a youthful impression, which makes her seem Japanese, huh?

"When she brought it to me, she told me it was because she couldn't give you anything this afternoon. I suppose that makes this partly an apology?"

Huh? This afternoon?

Ohhh. When they were brushing me, maybe? Aw, she doesn't have to worry about that. They didn't have to go full body with my brushing, but they did. I couldn't possibly ask

for more than that. But I *will* gratefully accept anything given freely. That's my puppy dog MO.

He places a plate in front of me, covered with a silver lid to keep the heat in.

"Dig in."

As soon as the old man lifts the lid, billowing steam and an aroma tickle my nose.

"A-arwf?! (*I-is this what I think it is?!*) "

A thick steak rests before me. Well, that's not the unusual part. The old man cooks me extra-thick steaks a lot, since I like meat so much. What I'm surprised about is what the steak is enshrined atop: a white pile. And that white pile is a food I'm extremely familiar with.

"W-woof, woof! (*Th-th-th-th-this is rice! Incredible, beautiful, white rice!*) "

It's a heap of white rice, with a sheen on it, boiled brilliantly to the perfect degree of softness.

"Toa is from the East, apparently. She says that over there, this white grain is a staple. It seems one can prepare it in many different ways, but this time, I just stuck with boiling it."

"Arrrwf...! (*Wh-wheeeeeeeeeew...! Th-this is a steak bowl!! The kind that's guaranteed to be delicious!!*) "

The nostalgic, sweet scent of the white rice combined with the meat's juicy aromas have my face planted in the grainy pile before I even remember to thank the old man.

"Scarf, scarf! (*It's amazing! It's amazing!*) "

Oh, how wonderful it is to taste meat, its juices, and rice that has fully absorbed the sauce. It's so good I can hardly contain myself.

Everything the old man cooks is wonderful, but it was just a little disappointing that the staples around here are bread and wheat-based products. But that slight disappointment is out the window now. I haven't had rice in months, and it's so delicious I could die.

“Oh, look at you. You’re gobbling this down even faster than usual. You really like it that much? Maybe I’ll have to ask the master to add this to the supply list.”

“Woof, woof! *(Yes, please and thank you!)* ”

While Papa is a frontier marquis, he’s also a wealthy merchant. He should be able to get rice from the East pretty easily. After all, he never seems to have trouble getting anything else he wants.

“All right, all right. I can tell you’re happy. Your tail will go flying off if you wag it any harder. If the rice has you this overjoyed, then it was worth the young lady Toa bringing it to me. And, seeing she brought it especially for you, I figured you’d eat more than your fill, so I made a lot. There’s plenty more where that came from.”

“Woof, woof, woof, woof!! *(Seconds, seconds, seconds, seconds!!)* ”

“...You’re going too fast. Calm down a little before you eat,” says the old man with a sigh, though he still dishes me out another heaping helping of steak bowl.

“Arwf!! *(Today I eat! Even if my stomach bursts open, I eat!!)* ”

“Mrrrump. *(Indeed. Let’s eat plenty.)* ”

Seated next to me is a cat with a red coat of fur—I don’t know when she showed up. And before I can process her arrival, she snatches some food away.

“Woof! *(Curse you, Nahura! You always appear when it’s time for food! Well, I won’t lose to you—graaaaahhh!)* ”

“Squeak?! *(H-hey, remember to leave some for me! I cannot leave here when that cook is nearby, if you recall! Are either of you listening to me?!)* ”

“Chomp, chomp. *(I am, I am. This is incredible!)* ”

“Mrrrump, mrrrump. *(I’m listening, too. This is heavenly!)* ”

“Squeak, squeak!! *(This is going beyond mere absentmindedness!)* ”

And so we ate and ate and ate until the pot was completely empty.



"Squeak... (And here I thought no one could eat until they literally burst.) "

"Grfh... (Ahh, it was so good... I can't move anymore...)"

I roll onto my lady's bed and lie down. My stomach is bulging, so I'll have to sleep on my back. And as for Nahura, she ate what she wanted and left immediately.

Well, I doubt I can sneak out tonight to go play anyway. My stomach is too full. I doubt I could move even if I wanted to. The bed sorta kinda seems like it's squeaking and creaking more than usual. If I had to guess, I'd say it's because of the added body weight from my binge.

"Squeak, squeak. (This is your punishment for taking my share. If you've learned your lesson, then be careful not to overeat in the future.) "

"Arwf. (But I refuse.) "

My lust for food cannot be stopped. I *will* be eating a ton again tomorrow.

"I've never had rice before, but it was really good."

"I'm so glad you were happy with it!"

The young lady, fresh out of the bath, is having Toa comb her hair. It looks like she's come to understand the virtues of rice as well.

"Routa's tummy got really big, too."

"Arwf...! (Nooo, Lady Mary, please, don't poke me right now...!)"

"Was... Was it good?" asks Toa with trepidation.

"Woof, woof! (More than good—the best!)"

I wag my tail to express my happiness. I feel bad, though—the rice belonged to her, and it seems like I ate most of it myself.

“Hee-hee, I’m glad to hear it. It was so much that I wouldn’t have been able to eat it all myself. Thanks for eating all of that.”

Toa pets me under the chin as I lie faceup, then she bows to the young lady and leaves the room.

Lady Mary yawns. “I’m really tired, too. I’m going to sleep a little early tonight.”

After slipping into bed, she hugs me tight.

“Good night, Routa, and you, too, little mouse. Let’s play lots again tomorrow.”

“Arrrwf. (*Good niight.*) ”

“Squeak. (*Mm. Those who sleep well will grow up well.*) ”

The young lady turns the light off and immediately falls asleep, and I immediately hear the adorably soft breaths of slumber. I should sleep, too, while I’m still basking in the happiness of a full belly.

I have to say, the pet life really is the best life. The food’s great, everyone’s nice, and I’ve made so many friends—something I didn’t have in my previous life. I’m gonna live out the rest of my days in fun and laziness.

And yet, as the bed continued its cries of protestation, that humble dream of mine would soon crumble into ephemerality...

Creak, creak.

Creak-creak, creak-creak.

Creak-creak-creak-creak-creak-creak-creak-creak.

"Arwf...? (Nn...? What? What's that sound?) "

I'd finally fallen into a nice, comfy sleep, but now I'm wide awake again. I lift my heavy eyelids and search for the source of the sound.

I'm in the young lady's room, and it's not particularly different from usual. Yet still, the creaking continues.

And I didn't have to think about it too hard.

The source is the bed creaking under my body, finally unable to endure my full weight any longer.

The creaking changes to a snapping, and in that moment I know I've just broken the bed legs.

"A-arwf...?! (Ah, crap...?!)"

After a moment of weightlessness, my field of vision lowers a grade. With a loud thud, the bed completely breaks.

"Arwf?! (That scared me... Wait, what about Lady Mary?!)"

Thanks to how she was hugging my fluffy body and the thick mattress, she doesn't appear to have been injured.

Her soft breathing continues, marked by a quiet giggle, her face still buried in my fur. I can't believe she slept

through that.

She's such a deep sleeper that it worries me. Still, it did save me. Well, not really: All four of the bed's legs have snapped right in half, and the canopy rests slanted on top of me.

What now? Was it because I'm too fat?

Maybe it's because I keep eating so much, then going right to sleep, but when I look at myself in the mirror again, I find my whole body is shockingly round.

Hey, wait, when the heck did I get this fat?

"Arwrw... (So jiggly. I'm a jelly dog...)"

As I freak out, Len shows up.

"Squeak. (Well, well. I cannot even seem to get a good night's sleep. And you're not a dog. You're a Fen Wolf.)"

"Arwf! (Small difference! The only thing separating dogs from wolves is whether or not you can raise them as pets.)"

In which case I'd rather be a dog with no pride. I wanna live my life completely carefree, woof.

But this isn't the time to be arguing about any of that silliness.

"Arwf... (If I go wake up Miranda, they'll find me out for sure... Can't you do something with your magic? Like making a brand-new one or something?)"

"Squeak... (Time-reversal magic is an advanced, forbidden magic lost to the ages. Wait—I'm not saying I can't do it! But it would require a massive amount of time and mana to prepare the spell...)"

"Arwf. (What, then you can't do it? Great. You're useless.)"

"S-squeak?! (Wh-what was that?! In the first place, this is your fault for getting so fat!)"

"A-arwf! (I-I am not fat! Lady Mary said I was nice and cute and chubby!)"

"Squeak. (Breaking the bed like that would not pass for 'cute.')

"...Arwf... (...You're right...)"

No point in dragging it out. I have to find a way to solve this. I roll over and out of the half-destroyed bed; then, making sure not to step on any of its shards, I leave the room... Or so I thought.

"...Arwf? (...*Huh?*) "

I can't leave.

"Arwf? Arwf? (*Huh? Huh? That's strange.*) "

I try to start walking again, but I can't get any farther than the doorway.

"Squeak? (*What are you doing?*) "

"A-arwf...?! (*N-no, I just, wait, this... Am I stuck?!*) "

You're kidding, right? Are you serious?

My upper body is out the door, but my stomach is perfectly stuck.

But complaining won't help. I have to get out of here somehow.

"Arwgh... (*Urgh...*) "

Oh, when I planted myself, I got a little farther. If I slowly and gradually add a little force, I think I can get out.

"Squeak. (*You shouldn't try and force yourself out. The door frame is creaking.*) "

"A-arwf, arwf. (*I-I can get out. I got through this afternoon somehow. Heave, ho, heave, ho!*) "

I suck in my belly as much as I possibly can and gradually tense my legs. And look—when I do, the resistance holding me back suddenly lessens!

"Arwf! (*I did it! I'm out!*) "

I burst out of the room and arrive in the hallway. At the same time, a dissonant *snap-crack* rings out from behind me.

"...Squeak. (...*Well, you're out now, certainly. But at what cost?*) "

Len points, and I look to see a perfectly destroyed door frame. It's torn away along with the wall, and so busted up I can't possibly make an excuse for it.

"Arwf!! (*Wahhh?! Now I've done it!!*) "

Dust flies, and parts of the wall patter down to the floor. It's a terrible sight—it looks like a giant burst through here.

“Arwf, arwf! (*C-curse this Fenrir body! It's too powerful!*) ”

No regular dog would ever break through a wall!

“Lady Mary! I heard a loud noise! Is everything okay?!”

Th-that voice—Miranda?! Oh, crap! I hear her footsteps dashing up the stairs.

“Nn...nn? Routa, did you do something...?”

Now even the young lady is awake. She's sitting up in bed, sleepily rubbing her eyes. Wh-what do I do?! What do I do?!

And so, in this critical situation to end all critical situations, I...

...run the hell away.



“Routa! Where are you, Routa?!”

“Nobody's mad at you! You can come out!”

Lady Mary, Toa, and others from the mansion are searching it up and down, calling my name.

“Arwf. (*I'm sorry, Lady Mary, everyone...*) ”

I watch them all from my vantage point in the brush a short distance away.

“Arwf... (*There's no way I can face you all in this state...*) ”

I swallow my tears and begin walking deeper into the forest. The destruction of the bed and walls, to begin with, was all because I got too fat. I won't go back to them until I've regained my original trim shape.

Yes, I've made up my mind. Made it up so hard nothing will break my resolve. Not because I'm scared this will be one of those things where they say they're not angry, but explode in rage once I go back. Certainly not!

"Squeak. *(Well, you're out of the mansion. What will you do now?)* "

"Arwf! *(I have to do something about this body, duh!)* "

I've grown too accustomed to the old man's delicious meals. Food found out in the wild won't be to my tastes. And if there's nothing to eat, I'll obviously have to get thinner.

What an impeccable plan! I'm so great I think I'm falling in love with myself.

"Squeak. *(Hmm. I doubt this will go well, but I suppose you may as well try.)* "

"Woof! *(Yeah, I'll get it done! And then you'll see the strength of my determination!)* "



"Arwf... *(I can't do it...)* "

"Squeak?! *(That was quick!!)* "

Len scolds me from atop my head.

"Squeak?! *(You are aware that it hasn't even been three hours, yes?! Do you even know the meaning of the word fasting?)* "

Idiot. Yes, it's been *three whole hours* since I went into the forest. Which means it's already late morning. I haven't had breakfast, and I won't have lunch. At this rate I'll die of starvation.

"Arrrwf... *(Waaahhh... I'm so hungry... I'm starving...)* "

I've been walking all over without a destination, so I don't know where I'm even walking to right now. Am I going to burn out the last of my strength in this forest unbeknownst to everyone else?

"Squeak, squeak... *(You've only just left the mansion, and yet your despair is palpable... In a way, that's amazing...)* "

"Arwf! *(Thanks!)* "

"Squeak! *(It wasn't a compliment!)* "

Then *give* me a compliment. It's every pet's dream to get praised for doing nothing.

"Mrrrow. (*Routa, please share your lunch with me.*) "

Nahura appears out of thin air as usual. She has an "anchor" or whatever set up on me. Thanks to that stupid spatial magic of hers, she's basically glued to me.

"Woof! (*Too bad for you. I'm in the middle of being fabulously hungry myself!*) " In fact, if you've got lunch, I'd be the one asking for it.

I do Nahura the favor of explaining the story thus far.

"Mew. (*I see. I'm amazed you survived not having breakfast. Truly a feat only you could manage.*) "

"Arwf? (*Right? I'm great, right?*) "

"Squeak. (*Please understand that she is making fun of you in a roundabout manner.*) "

I don't notice these things because I'm so hungry my brain isn't functioning.

As I'm wandering around the forest on a still-empty stomach, I suddenly catch a whiff of something.

"Arwf? (*Hm? I think I smell something sweet over in that direction.*) "

I turn my nose up and sniff at the scent. I've never smelled something like this before, but my appetite says it's something delicious.

"Arrrwf... (*Hmm... I can't resist this...*) "

"S-squeak?! (*H-hey, what happened to your fasting?!*) "

Fasting? Yeah, I'm doing it. The thing is, it's such a good smell I was thinking I'd partake just by getting a closer whiff. That's all.

I continue to be drawn in by the aroma, my floppy, bouncing gut a-swinging.

"Arwf. (*The smell's getting better and better.*) "

Actually, isn't this the smell of someone cooking? I can see a thin billow of smoke in front of me, too—proof that someone's using fire to cook. I can almost see a few figures doing the work beyond the trees now, too.

This is an undeveloped forest where people never normally venture. Those who live here are either animal or monster. And the ones who recently moved here.

I've seen these girls before, with their silvery hair hanging over their ears, stirring that pot over a flame.

"Arwf! (Hey, it's Aruru and Iruru!)"

Standing there are the elf girls we saved in the Royal Capital. From oldest to youngest, they're Aruru, Iruru, Ururu, Eruru, and Oruru—five sisters whose names make me want to complain about the elves' cheap naming traditions. These two are the eldest and the second eldest.

"Woof, woof? (If you're all here, does that mean this is where the village was? The one you wanted to restore?)"

"Lord Routa?! How long have you been there...?! Also, I deeply apologize for not being able to properly greet you back then...!"

When she says *back then*, maybe she means when we passed each other before in the forest. We were in a hurry at the time, too, after all. I told them I'd come to play sometime, but then I forgot.

"Woof, woof. (No, it's okay. Sorry for imposing so suddenly. Is this everyone's new village?)"

I stop Aruru and Iruru's bowing and look over the village. Several houses have been built around large trees. They're kind of like treehouses, or secret bases, huh? And it isn't just the elf sisters—others I don't know are here, too. They're hard at work, hammers in hand.

"Yes. We've been slowly calling the other villagers who got separated from us here, so it's going quite well. And everything is thanks to you, the King of the Fen Wolves, Lord Routa!" says Iruru, softly smiling and bowing her head to me.

"Arwf. (I mean, I didn't do anything.)"

Papa's the one sending the money so they can revive the village, and the land also belongs to him. The only thing I really ended up doing was saving these girls when they were

caught by the slave trader. And even then, Hecate and the rest were helping me, too, so they're whom you should be thanking.

"Still, if not for your control over the forest, we would never have been able to live here together."

"Iruru and I probably would have been forced into prostitution, and our fleeing friends would have eventually died in the wild."

Hmm. You can thank me for all that if you want. It won't change the fact that I'm just a humble pet dog.

But their eyes are sparkling as they look at me; they don't seem to be ready to listen to that. It's getting to be a pain, so let's leave it at this.

"Ah, we can't be standing around! Everyone, gather round! Make preparations to receive Lord Routa!"

In response to Aruru's call, everyone in the village assembles, wondering what the commotion is all about.

"Oh, it's our king!"

"Welcome back, Lord Routa!"

"It has been a long time, Lord Routa."

The three former-bandit sisters are in the bunch, too. The one wearing the neutral expression is Ururu. The tiny one with glasses is Eruru. The tallest of them and the one who seems to be the most put-together is the youngest, Oruru.

Ururu definitely looks like a middle child, but while Eruru is tiny, Oruru has developed far too much in certain places. It's hard to believe she's the youngest.

"Elves vary greatly from individual to individual when it comes to growth... Our appearances don't change much once we reach maturity."

Oruru's right. The elves gathered here all look young, but I have no idea who's older than whom.

Every one of them is beautiful, though—just what I'd expect from elves. It's not hard to see why they would be preferred among slave traders. Slaves who stay young

forever and have inherent value in their rarity would naturally drive up prices.

They won't be in that sort of danger now that they're in this forest protected by Fen Wolves. Hopefully they'll be able to live in peace.

I made absolutely sure Garo and the others were aware, too. The Fen Wolves should have changed their patrol routes to include this village.

Still, everyone really looks young. I wonder if elves can tell the difference?

"Arwf. (What about Hecate? How does she look to all of you? I can't even get close to telling what age she is.) "

"Lady Luluarus? Oh, she's been a famed, powerful magician ever since my grandmother's grandmother was just a baby. She's incredibly old even by elven standards, I suspect. I don't think even the longer-lived elves are known to survive *that* long."

Wait, she's that advanced in age? Should I be calling her Grandma Hecate next time I see her? No, wait. Whenever I start talking like that, she shows up from out of nowhere, so I'm going to stop right there. I'm way too afraid of her rage. She could impale me with the icy daggers of her glare alone.

"Now then, if you'll excuse me for a moment. All right, everyone, help out! Treat Lord Routa as our esteemed guest and show him our humble gratitude!"

""""Yes, ma'am!""""

Aruru claps her hands, and the elf girls all respond cheerfully.

"Lord Routa, please come this way. I'm going to boil some water, so you can relax while I cook."

Iruru squats a little, trying to lead me farther in.

"A-arwf? (Huh? Oh, actually, I'm in the middle of a diet. I've gotta get rid of all this squishy fat, you see.) "

"Now, now, don't be modest. Please, Lord Routa, allow us to show you our gratitude in whatever small ways we can."

Hmm. Could anyone refuse a plea given with such teary eyes? I think not.

"And elven cooking uses a lot of berries and fruit, so it's very nutritious, too."

"Arwf, arwf! *(Oh, well, then I can have as much as I want! I'm gonna eat tons!)* "

"Squeak. *(She said it's healthy, not that you'd grow thinner... And once again, the women in your vicinity have multiplied...)* "

"Mrow! *(Ah-ha-ha! Routa is popular with ladies no matter what race they are, huh?)* "

The elves are inviting me in, so it would be rude of me to not partake of their hospitality.





I'm relaxing, sprawled out in a big bathtub made from a dead, hollowed-out tree stump.

"Arrrwf... (Ahhh... This bath feels sooo good!)"

Herbs and fruits float in the bathwater, their chemical compositions making me feel really nice and warm.

"Okay, Lord Routa, please have this."

Aruru offers a fruit skewered on a fork to me. It has a savory aroma. Did she sauté it with butter?

"Munch, munch. (This is great. Cooked fruit is better than I thought it'd be.)"

I used to be the kind of guy who couldn't tolerate pineapple on sweet-and-sour pork, but this? This could definitely work. Its inherent sweetness is even stronger, maybe because of the saltiness of the butter, and the way the juices flow out when I eat it is amazing. Every time I bite down, it makes a wet crunching sound.

"My lord, my lord! Have this, too!"

"This soup is very tasty as well."

"My lord, here is a mushroom skewer."

"Oh, stop it, everyone. Lord Routa will be bothered if you all try to feed him at once... But would you care for some of this juice, Lord Routa?"

From berry pies to vegetable soups, the elf girls personally feed me dish after dish, all of them delicious in a different way from the old man's cooking.

"Arwf, arwf! (I'll eat them, I'll eat them all!)"

Dishes are proffered to me from every direction, and I devour all of them as they come.

The bath feels great, the food tastes great, and the elves are cute. Is this heaven?

"...Squeak. (...You've completely forgotten your goal, haven't you?)" groans Len as she munches on some nuts.

Goal? What was my goal again?

"Mew! (*Ah-ha-ha! I don't think this is going to work,*) "

laughs Nahura as she sips on some soup.

Not going to work? What's not going to work? Come to think of it, why did I come to the forest like this, anyway?

"Lord Routa, is something amiss? You've stopped eating. Is the food not to your liking?"

"Arwf, arwf. (*No, not at all. It's totally good. I could eat this stuff all day.*) "

"Ah, very good. Keep it coming, everyone."

""""Yes, ma'am!""""

Huh? Wasn't I thinking about something just now? What was it? I've forgotten. Must not have been important anyway.

And so I gorge myself on the elven regional dishes, which fly at me one after another.

As a result...

"Arrrwf?! (*Am... Am I even fatter than before?!*) "

"Squeak. (*Of course, you are. You've been wolfing down everything these elves tell you to.*) "

Having gotten significantly heavier in a very short time, I drag my rotund body out of the bath.

"Arwf... (*U-urgh... I can't believe I let myself get even bigger...*) "

"Squeak... (*That's why I told you... Your lack of self-restraint is remarkable...*) "

"Arwf. (*Thanks.*) "

"Squeak. (*Once again, that wasn't a compliment.*) "

When I shake myself dry, the elves look at me with anxious faces.

"L-Lord Routa? Have we made some sort of mistake...?!"

"Woof, woof. (*No, no. Thanks for the hospitality, everyone. But I have an important goal to accomplish, so I've gotta go now.*) "

I turn my back to the elves. I can't remain here any longer.

"B-but, Lord Routa...!"

"Please, stay in this village forever...!"

"Please don't go, Lord Routa...!"

I'm sorry, everyone. We'll meet again someday.

""""Lord Routa!!""""

I turn my back to the elves trying to stop me, fight back the tears, and set off.

"...Squeak. (...Look, this is not as tragic a farewell as you're making it out to be.)"



"Arwf... (Phew... That was a close one. If I'd stayed there much longer, I would have gone past the point of no return.)"

"Mrow! (Well, I think it's probably too late for that!)"

"Squeak. (It took you far too long, but you've done well to finally realize it yourself.)"

Sweet! I got a compliment.

That's right. This time, I'm *really* determined. If I go past the point of no return, it will be at the young lady's side. I'm going to get my slim body back and return to my eat-and-sleep lifestyle with her.

"Squeak... (Perhaps I should retract my last statement...)"

"Arwf, arwf. (What am I going to do, though? I doubt I'll be able to fight my appetite.)"

"Squeak. (Indeed. I knew that from the beginning.)"

Wait... What?! How could she know a fact in advance that I didn't even realize?! I have to say, she has a terrifying power of insight.

"Squeak. (It's because I don't go along with your antics.)"

Please go along with my antics. It's lonely otherwise!

"Mrow, mrow?! (Oh, then I have an idea! Why not exercise to lose weight? If you move more than you eat, won't you get thinner?) "

"Arwf! (That's it! Nahura, are you some kind of genius?!)"

"Mew. (Eh-heh-heh, you think so? I think anyone would have come up with the same idea normally.) "

"Squeak. (He is a natural-born good-for-nothing, so I suppose it can't be helped.) "

I think they're saying some pretty mean things about me. But now I have a path to pursue.

"Arwf! (Great, in that case, time to exercise! I'll start with the basics. Let's run!)"

I get Len and Nahura onto my back and launch into a full-speed sprint.

Burn, my Cosmo! Or rather, my fat! I'll burn off every last bit of excess fat I've accumulated in my body!

Jumping over tree roots, parting the underbrush, leaping over streams. As expected of my Fenrir body. Even after it's changed into a marshmallow, its movements haven't grown dull.

As I start to think about going all the way to the forest's edge, I hear a familiar voice.

"Grwl, grwl! (You there! Don't break formation! A moment's carelessness can spell death! Assume any slipup means the entire unit will die!)"

This sharply reverberating voice belongs to the princess of the Fen Wolves, Garo.

When I run in the direction of her voice, many other Fen Wolves aside from her are gathered there.

Garo barks an order, and they swiftly change formation in response, going back and forth through the forest. They must be doing some kind of training.

"Woof, woof! (Yo, Garo! Whatcha doin' out here?)"

"G-grwl! (M-my king! I'm terribly sorry for not coming out to meet you!)"

"Arwf... (Actually, it's scarier when you immediately appear as soon as I call you, so...) "

She's always so close by that I sometimes feel like she's stalking me. The instant I call her, she seems to appear behind me. It's enough to spook *anyone* a little. So please, stop doing that.

But she seems to have been in the forest all day today, doing something.

"Arwf, arwf? (What's all this, then? Are you having some kind of event?) "

What would a Fen Wolf event even be like? Hunting? A duel? Everything I think of is fraught with danger.

"Grwl. (Yes, my king. I am training the young Fen Wolves before they go into real battle!) "

Training. Coupled with the soldierly impression Garo gives off, I can feel the military atmosphere from here.

"Arwf? (Like what they call boot camp, then?) "

Exhaustion is plain on the faces of the young Fen Wolves lined up in front of Garo and me, but they have fierce looks on their faces.

"Grwl, grwl! (Our military drills are so perfect that we will have no problems should war with human tribes break out at any moment!) "

"Woof, woof. (Err, like I said, though, don't fight them, all right? I thought I made it clear that everyone should get along.) "

"Grwl... (Indeed, however...) " Garo's ears droop in disappointment.

It's adorable, but I need to put my foot down on this. With this millennium-old grudge or whatever, the Fen Wolves' hostility toward humans won't die out so easily.

What am I to do? Still, the old man's food *has* softened them up quite a bit. Fortunately, it seems like they'll get on well with the elves currently building their village in the woods. They're all loyal to my commands, so hopefully we can build a good relationship with them, but...

"Arwf, arwf... (Training, huh...) "

Given their race, they were strong to begin with, and now they're bettering themselves out here even more? I mean, they *are* strong. They'd be able to control the entire forest.

"Meeew. (Routa, training with them might be a convenient way to lose weight, wouldn't it?) " Nahura snickers.

"Arwf! (That's it!) "

Everything's clicked into place. Man, Nahura, you're good. Wide awake today, I see.

"M-mew? (Wait, are you serious? I was only joking... Doesn't this training the wolves are doing look kind of tough...?) "

I concur. But circumstances being what they are, I don't have any options left.

"Arwf, arwf. (I need to lose weight as fast as possible and go back to the young lady. It doesn't matter if it's a little tough—if there's any way to slim down quickly, I'll take that over the alternative.) "

I doubt Lady Mary could handle many days of me not being around. She was bawling her eyes out when I left the mansion to look for her medicine, too.

Actually, *I'm* the one who won't be able to endure it for much longer. I don't have enough Mary in my life right now. I'll have to get a refill by having her pet me.

"G-grwl...? (My king, are you by chance discussing joining this training yourself...?) " asks Garo as though she's frightened by the prospect.

"Woof! (Yeah, if that's okay, Garo! No need for modesty. Do your worst!) "

"G-grwl, grwl! (I-I could never! A great and wise king such as yourself has no need of lowly training routines! The very thought of you covered in mud along with the new recruits—) "

"Woof, woof. (About that. I'm a newborn Fen Wolf myself, y'know. I'm basically a new recruit. Just like them. Come on,

Garo. You're the only one I can ask for this.) "

"G-grwl?! (I'm the only one?!)"

Garo jumps, as though surprised, and then closes her eyes for a short time.

"...Grwl. (...Understood, my king. If you would deign to place that much trust in me, I must endeavor to repay it.) "

She quickly assumes a sitting posture.

"Grwl! (I, Garo, shall dedicate my existence to training our king into a first-rate soldier!)"

W-wait. Did I say something I shouldn't have? I didn't flip some weird switch in her brain, did I?

Garo's eyes sharpen, and suddenly I'm not feeling so good about this.

"A-arwf, arwf...? (U-um, Garo? Go easy on me, please. I know I said to do your worst, but maybe you could fit a little bit of gentleness in there—)"

"Grgawl!! (Shut up, recruit!!)"

"A-arwf?! (E-eep?!)"

"Grwl, grwl! (You will speak only when spoken to! Get moving, now, instead of opening that filthy sewer you call a mouth! Do you understand me, maggot?!)"

She's a drill sergeant?!

Her personality transformed, Garo barks at me, a whip getting me in line.

"Mew! (Do your best, Routa!)"

"Squeak! (We shall be watching over you from here!)"

At some point Nahura and Len left me and climbed up a tree. Damn it, how dare you two weasel out of this!

It's started to rain, and me and the rest of the mud-covered trainees continue running through the forest.

"Hahh... Hahh..."

I run unsteadily, tongue lolling out of my mouth. My new Fen Wolf friends running nearby are just as out of breath as I am.

"Grwl, grwl! *(What's the matter, you whelps?! An old goat could run longer than you! Show me what you've got!)*"

The drill sergeant running alongside us barks antagonism at us. She's run the same distance we have, but she shows no signs of exhaustion at all. Is that the gap in our experience?

"Grwl, grwl! *(Don't look down! Feel your footing with the soles of your feet! Your eyes should always be focused on spotting the enemy!)*"

As we stagger forward, none of us can even respond to Garo. Eventually I trip over a stone hidden beneath some mud and fallen leaves.

"Squeak, squeak?! *(Are you hurt, beloved?!)*"

Nahura and Len, who have been safely observing, run to me.

"Grwl, grwl!! *(Don't spoil him, brats!!)*"

But Garo intercepts them.

“Grgowl!! (Get up, whelp! You will not cry! You will not laugh! If you don’t want your tiny balls crushed, you will run!! Go, go, go!!) ”

E-eeeeek! Garo’s so freaking scary!

I frantically work my legs to stand up, and then, still spattered with mud, I dash back to where the others are running.

“Grwl, grwl! (Listen up! You’re the lowest forms of life on this planet! Maggots! Piles of shit on legs! But once you’ve survived my training, you whelps will no longer be maggots—you will be warriors!) ”

Training in the rain is mercilessly sapping all the warmth from my body. Garo’s “encouragement,” though, blots out the sound of that cold rain, driving us to go even faster.

“Grwl, grwl! (Hate me! Hate your own weakness! But don’t let your hate consume you! Let it feed you! Let it make you stronger! As long as you don’t give up, I will not abandon you! Throw away your young wolf’s dependence right here and right now! Bare your fangs and run to the ends of the earth!) ”

As we’re gifted with passionate words that make me want to unconsciously reply, “Sir, yes, sir!” we continue our training in the rain.

Officer Garo’s constant drills last until late at night.



As Routa was going through his hellish special training, one monster reigned supreme in the eastern forest.

“Rrgh...! (I am lord of this forest...!) ”

The monster was called Redarmor. He had originally been just a bear, but his destiny had been forever changed when a huge storm of mana blew through the woods.

The raging mana was actually something produced during the battle between the Fen Wolves and Lich, the Demon Lord's adjutant, but he had no way of knowing that right now.

Most of that mana had been dissipated, sealed by a witch. But what remained had accumulated in the cave he slept in. The powerful mana had given him wisdom and incredible strength—and awakened the ambition slumbering within him.

His height had increased to the point where he could reach the forest's canopy, and one swing of his mighty arm could smash boulders and cut down thick trees. Eventually, none remained in his territory who could rival him, and at that point, Redarmor was confident his time had come.

"Rrrgggghhhhhhhh!! (Come out, Fen Wolves!! Let us make it clear which of us is truly worthy of being this forest's ruler!!) " roared Redarmor into the dark of night, scratching his crimson chest hair, which, according to rumors, was stained with the blood of his foes.

It was a declaration of war.

Redarmor headed west, massive body swaying, the ground splitting underfoot. His destination was the territory of the Fen Wolves, who arrogantly claimed dominion over this forest. He would rip apart the weak little wolves with his bare paws and gain supremacy over these vast woods.

His eyes bloodshot with ambition, Redarmor began his advance.



"Grwl! (Lady Garo! I have news you may want to hear!)" said the Fen Wolf tasked with patrolling the area, having run to Garo's side.

Having already given the recruits instructions, Garo turned around with a calm demeanor. *"Grwl? (What is it?"*

Something urgent?) "

"Grwl! (An invader, ma'am!) "

"...Grwl? (...An invader, you say? Not an intruder?) "

"Grwl! (Yes, an invader! The enemy is destroying all the trees and animals in his path, leaving only devastation in his wake. He claims that he will wipe out the Fen Wolves and gain control over this forest.) "

"Grwl... (Is that so? Looks like someone with a spine has finally shown up...) "

They frequently hunted corrupted monsters who had lost all sense of reason and were going on a rampage. But it had been a long time since an enemy had appeared and demanded a challenge while still in their right mind.

"Grwl, grwl. (How should we proceed, ma'am? We're currently keeping an eye on him from out of reach, but at your order, my clan will defeat him.) "

"Grwl... (No...) "

Garo paused, then turned her back.

To face the Fen Wolves, who had just completed their entire training course.

"Grwl, grwl. (Good timing. I'll make it these recruits' graduation test.) "

Having sensed the battle soon to come, the Fen Wolves were filled with bloodlust, their eyes blazing. Garo chuckled at that, then looked around at them as if to drive the rain away.

Lined up before her were the young and talented who had overcome her hellish training. Their eyes held no trace of weakness, and their trained bodies spoke to their belief that each was nothing but a single fang in a mouthful of teeth.

"Grwl? (I ask you. What is your purpose?) "

""Grwl! Grwl! Grwl! (The hunt! The hunt! The hunt!) ""

"Grwl? (What is your pride?) "

""Grwl! Grwl! Grwl! (The hunt! The hunt! The hunt!) ""

“Grwl! (I know that, idiot! That’s why I’m pissed off—the lack of instructions. What happened to our messenger? She should have apprised the others of the situation a long time ago.) ”

The Fen Wolves were unsure how to attack, but not because they were powerless in the face of Redarmor’s overwhelming might. The opponent was strong, sure—but nothing a coordinated Fen Wolf assault couldn’t beat.

Any such assault, though, was blocked by one of the codes established by the Fen Wolves. The only monsters they were allowed to hunt and kill without question were those that had been violated by magic and lost their minds or their ability to reason.

Redarmor was committing terrible atrocities, but it was of his own volition that he was trying to expand his domain. If they were going to fight—as a species—over this territory, that would be a war with their pride on the line; and as the leader of a single team of one clan, the captain couldn’t decide that for herself.

And the truth was, Redarmor was *strong* .

Her earlier aggressive assertions aside, if it did come down to a hunt, it would be an all-out raid involving all the clans.

“Grw, grw! (Captain!) ”

“Grwl! (You’re back! What did Lady Garo say?!) ”

“Grw... (She, uh... She gave the order to withdraw.) ”

“Grwl?! (Withdraw?! What idea could she— Wait, didn’t she start personally raising a bunch of talented youngsters recently? This must mean their training is complete.) ”

The captain nodded at the messenger’s news in understanding.

Meanwhile, Redarmor had concluded that the Fen Wolves were a lot of cowards, unable to do anything but watch from a safe distance.

“Gohh-ohh! (Weak! Every one of you Fen Wolves is weak! The forest deserves a better ruler than the likes of you!) ”

He continued to chase out the Fen Wolves with swings of his enormous arms.

"Grrrwl. (Hmph. Howl all you like. Your fate is sealed.)"

The captain nimbly avoided Redarmor's attacks and jumped up to a tree branch, looking down at Redarmor.

"Grrwl. (Soon you will know what a Fen Wolf hunt really looks like.)"

The Fen Wolves all concealed themselves at once, their shapes melting away into the night forest.

"Grrwl. (Show us how much you can squirm, whelp.)"

The Fen Wolves completely disappeared. At the same time, he sensed a palpable bloodlust a great distance away, causing Redarmor to frown, wrinkles appearing on the ridge of his nose.



Redarmor had been so sure of himself.

These Fen Wolves are nothing to be frightened of. A bunch of incompetents—the most they can do is witness my tyranny from afar.

It's your turn—come out, King of the Fen Wolves, or whatever you call yourself. The great Redarmor will feast upon you personally.

It had been a few minutes since he'd galvanized himself with such thoughts.

"Goh... Gohhh... (Hahh... Urgh...)"

In this minute, however, he'd been forced into an entirely different situation.

Now he was running this way and that in a frantic attempt to escape, his giant frame swaying and his eyes unfocused. This weakened state was a stark difference from that of the monster who had, mere moments ago, been a walking natural disaster.

"Gohh-gohh...! (What... What the hell are they?! This isn't right...! What the hell am I fighting against...?!) "

He, the strongest of them all, had no recourse but to flee.

With every swing of his arms and gnash of his fangs, he could crush anyone, no matter who or what it was, just as one could crush a dead leaf.

Now he was cornered. At his wits' end.

By themselves, he was sure they were weak. And yet he couldn't beat them. He didn't even hold a candle to them.

Whenever he attacked, they would use the trees as shields. Then, before he could react, they'd counterattack from behind. He would swing back around, meaning to rebuff them, but they would already be gone. They were whittling him down, little by little, like they were waiting for a chance to finish him off.

Shadows leaped about the forest, up, down, in every direction—and each time, they would shake him.

The attacker was now the defender. It was no longer a contest. It was a rout.

To the Fen Wolves, Redarmor was just tonight's hunt.

"Gohh-gohh! (Damn...! Damn it all! If I could only hit—if I could only hit you, you'd be nothing! I never took you for cowards, Fen Wolves...! Come out and fight me in the open!)"

As if to scorn his cries, the trees in the forest swayed.

And then his wish was granted.

For as he fled, one Fen Wolf had appeared in front of him. This one was far larger than the others, more beautiful, and veiled in an aura that could only belong to someone extremely powerful.

"....."

There. I came out, just like you wanted , the white Fen Wolf seemed to say as he blocked Redarmor's escape. You won't lose in an all-out brawl, will you? Well then, you can attack me all you want. I won't dodge.

The utterly silent white wolf's attitude alone was enough to convey the message.

"G-gohh... *(You... You, you bastard...)* "

Redarmor instinctually understood. This white wolf was Fenrir, king of the wolves. The one who led the Fen Wolves, and the forest's ruler.

It was a good opportunity. That much was certain. If he could beat this one, he'd be able to usurp that position.

The scant remaining ambition lit a fire in his petrified body.

"Goohhhhhaaaaa!! *(I... I am the strongest!!)* "

Aided by the momentum of his dash, his arm swung down, portending the most powerful attack Redarmor had ever unleashed.

Thick nails carved the wind, striking viciously into the King of the Fen Wolves.

The king, without even blinking, took the hit.

An impact. A flash and a roar, bright and loud as a bolt of lightning, knocked over a swath of trees, making Redarmor certain of his victory.

However, he was mistaken.

"Arwf... *(That was a good attack. Touching, even...)* "

The white wolf king had taken Redarmor's full-power strike unscathed.

"Arwf. *(Touching, though pointless.)* "

The king's disappointed words caused Redarmor to take a step back.

"Goha... Goha... *(Wha... What...)* "

Now that he'd entirely lost his will to fight, a pack of Fen Wolves set upon him from every direction. It was more than enough of an opening for them to finish him off.

"Gh...gowahhhhhhhhhh?!
(Gyaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhh?!) "

And so, in less than an hour, Redarmor's unstoppable advance met its end.



The rain had more than cleared up.

The young Fen Wolves had been covered in mud from their training, but the rain had washed them, the sunlight had dried them, and they had given an absolutely beautiful performance.

“Grw! (*Listen up!*) ”

We’d formed a line, backs straight, in front of Garo, our instructor.

“Grw, grw! (*As of today, as of this instant, you are no longer maggots—you are warriors! Now that you have overcome my training, you aren’t young pups needing to be protected by their parents. You can fight with your own strength as proud Fen Wolves! Swear by the blood coursing through your veins, and fight on until the moment you die!*) ”

“““Grrrrrowwwwwwwwwww!!”””

As the other Fen Wolves gave their valiant cries, I, too, howled my heart out.

After a breath, Garo, whose face had been strict until then, looked at us with gentle eyes.

Eyes that showed she’d completed her duty as our demonic drill sergeant.

“Grw, grw. (*You’ve done well to make it through this harsh training, everyone. I’m sorry for how difficult and painful it’s been. But you believed in me and stayed with me, and for that I want to thank you. I’m proud of each and every one of you.*) ”

“““Gr-grwl...! (*I-Instructor...!*) ”””

We all ran to Garo, surrounding her, and cried, nuzzling against one another.

Our bonds were invincible. Glory to the Fen Wolves. Glory to the king.

As Garo watched us sob, her eyes filled with compassion, she suddenly gave a start and looked at me.

"Gr-grwl...? (Routa...?) "

"Arwf? (Uh, yes, ma'am. I am Routa. Is something the matter, Instructor?) "

"Gr... (I'm...) "

I'm...?

"Grrrrrrwwwl!! (I'm so incredibly sorry!! I've done something absolutely inexcusable to our king!!) " cries Garo as she grovels incredibly low. She puts her tail between her hind legs, and, trembling madly, shoves her nose into her outstretched front legs.

Seeing her so afraid makes me snap out of it.

"Arwf?! (Wha— What was I doing?!) "

Without realizing it, I became one of the new recruits. Man, boot camp diets are terrifying.

But look! Thanks to the training, I've gotten my old figure back. A lean, tight stomach. Lithe, slender limbs. A dauntless, intrepid face.

"Squeak. (Well, what have we here? You've certainly slimmed down.) "

"Mrow. (Too true. Routa, you're so cool!) "

"Arw-rw? (Deh-heh, you think so?) "

After running over to me, Len and Nahura praise me.

And even I can tell. No matter how you look at me, I'm one hunk of a wolf—err, dog. I could go back to the mansion like this. I probably won't break any beds or smash any doors.

Sweet, I did it! Mission complete.

"Whiiiiine... (I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry...) "

Garo has turned into a robot programmed only to apologize.

"Woof, woof. (You don't need to apologize, Garo. I'm the one who asked you to do this.) "

Well, despite how harsh the training was, the hellishness of it all seems to have mostly fled my mind. I also feel like I just fought a giant bear or something, but I can't really remember. Letting Garo be that enthusiastic was my mistake, and it was her training that took all this weight off in a single day. What does she have to apologize for?

"Whine... (King... My king, Routa...)"

She comes to nuzzle me as she cries tears heavy with emotion.

There, there, you did admirably. Still, I don't feel anything for you whatsoever, given that you're an animal.

"Arwf? (Huh? Garo, are you, like, a little smaller than before?)"

She used to be only a little smaller than me. I'm not sure what happened, but now she's only big enough to come up to my chest. She's gotten two-thirds smaller.

"G-grwl... (N-no, my king. I haven't gotten smaller, but...)"

"Squeak. (You've gotten bigger.)"

"Mrrrow! (Routa, you're really big now!)"

"A-arwf? (I... What...?!)"

Once they say it, I notice that Nahura and Len look like specks now.

The real change was inside me all along.

I certainly succeeded at getting slimmer. But that was only because my body's volume stretched vertically. Without realizing it, I grew three times bigger than before.

"Ar-arrrrrrrrrwwf?! (Wh-what am I supposed to do like this?!)"

I'm huge. Gigantic. Inexcusably enormous.

And now I can't possibly go back to the mansion anymore—again! Nooo!

With my body having grown so big my head would probably reach all the way to the mansion's second story, even the mansion-dwellers, who look at me through rose-

tinted glasses, are sure to notice something's wrong. How am I supposed to go home now that I'm this big?

"Arrrww! (I'll never see my lady or anyone else ever again! Waahhhh!)"

I cry. In fact, I bawl.

Garo and the others, meanwhile, seem quite taken with my appearance. They're chittering about it. It all paints a terrible picture.

Also, it's amazing how the collar Hecate so casually gave me has stretched out along with my body. She must have made it assuming I'd grow. It seems to be made of material that can freely expand and contract, and even having gotten this big, I don't find it hard to breathe at all. Her nonchalant concern for me makes me happy—not! Why didn't she stuff her stupid concern and do some magic or something to stop me from growing?!

"Squeak. (Why not give up already, beloved? It might be nice living in the forest like this. In fact, it would make more sense. Humans raising the King of the Fen Wolves like some sort of common pet—it's unnatural, no matter how you think about it.)"

"Woof, woof! (I don't wanna! I wanna live as a pet doggy my whole life! I'd never wanna live like a wild wolf! Not in a million years!)"

I've already been endlessly spoiled. I could never do something like live in the wild at this point.

Falling onto my front legs, I wail bitterly at my own misfortune. How cruel this world is to me! I'll accept consolation now. *Glance, glance.*

"Mrow. (Well, setting Rوتا aside, I wonder why he got so big all of a sudden.)"

Setting me aside? Isn't that a little harsh?

"Squeak. (Hmm. My speculation is that it all started a little while back when he started getting fat.)"

"Mroow. (Yeah, he always ate so much before that, but then he suddenly started getting fatter. How long ago was

that?) ”

“Arwf? *(When I started getting fat?)* ”

I’ve never done anything besides eat and sleep, so I don’t remember. But if I have any recollection of when I was thinner, it would be this one: when I fought that giant skeleton. I’m pretty sure I wasn’t fat before then.

A skeleton calling itself a general in the Demon Lord’s army or something attacked us, and we battled to protect Mare, a ghost horse who had lost her memories.

Well, I say *battled* , but really, I just ate it. And it was delicious. I got to experience the umami of bones, something I could never taste while I was human. Couldn’t I have left a little bit, waited for it to regenerate, and eaten it again, forever? That was wasteful of me.

“Squeak. *(I’m always amazed by your nonchalant consideration of bloodcurdling ideas, but eating that skeleton was probably what caused this.)* ”

Huh? Why would bones make me fat? They have almost no calories. In fact, to even get fat off of meat, you’d need to eat through entire buffets. Speaking of meat, I really want some of the old man’s grilled steak... Ahh, now I’m hungry...

“Mrow? *(Routa, your thoughts always fly off into the clouds, huh?)* ”

“Squeak. *(Nothing’s changed; let it be.)* ”

I think immediately setting me aside like that is really mean.

“Squeak, squeak-squeak. *(Back to the matter at hand. Eating such a powerful monster must have caused its reserves of mana to build up inside you. The excess mana became excess fat which accumulated in your body. And then, thanks to the harsh training, it triggered a sudden growth spurt. You only looked plump and chubby because you were ‘bulking,’ as it were, before growing.)* ”

In other words, all the energy I saved up was released at once by the training and caused this gigantification incident? Wait, but that means...!

"Ar-arwf?! (Everything I do that I think is for the better is backfiring?!)"

I was trying to diet—and that actually made the situation worse.

Now that I've gotten this big, there's nothing else I can do. I can't even go back to the mansion now. I'll probably fail to adapt to bare-bones living in the forest and die a dog's death. It's hopeless. All I can do is cry. Cry, and weep, and bawl.

...Or so you'd think! However, I *do* still have a way to fix this.

"Arwf. (I'm out of options. I was going to save this as my ace in the hole, but...)"

I've had a secret plan—a perfect one—for if my identity was ever exposed to the young lady. I hadn't wanted to commit to such a tactic. After all, *learning* it would be a huge pain. But griping won't get me anywhere in this situation. I need to get my old form back soon and return to my lady.

"Woof! (Len!)"

I give Len a look filled with determination.

"Squeak? (What is it? Why are you looking at me with such a passionate gaze? Have you decided to give up, live in the forest, and mate with me? 'Bring it on,' as they say.)"

No, not at all. Also, you've been quietly absorbing the slang I use, haven't you?

"Woof! (Len! Lady Len!)"

With all my energy, I make a plea of Len, whose arms are folded.

"Woof, woof! (Please, teach me the art of shape-shifting!)"



Mastering the art of shape-shifting: a goal I'd first set my sights on when I saw Len use it to transform mice and people

and whatever else.

The technique lets you change your shape at will; I figured it might help me pretend to be a dog. And when she changed the ghost horse Mare from her spooky-scary-skeleton form into a wonderful black steed, I was fully convinced. If she could transform Mare, who was obviously a monster however you looked at her, into something that kept even Zenobia in the dark, then if I mastered it, my pet life would be fully secured. No doubt about it.

"Squeak, squeak! (I see! Yes, yes, I see! You want to learn the art of shape-shifting! I understand! You want to change into a dragon and produce offspring with me!)"

What? No.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak! (No, no, no need for others to chime in. My beloved has always been a pervert only aroused by the human form. Thankfully, I, too, have mastered the art of transforming into a human. You'd like us both to transform into humans and mate that way!)"

Len, causing a clamor, seems to be the only one not understanding this.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak! (You've clearly thought this through. It's no wonder we could resolve our racial differences via shape-shifting techniques! Though, of course, I would accept you no matter what form you were in. Considering we are to make children, there is little doubt things would go well were we both human! If that is what you wish, I will spare no attention to detail in teaching it to you!)"

I'm trying to do something entirely different from what Len is hoping for, but if she wants to teach me the technique, maybe it'll be easier if she keeps on misunderstanding. I *am* terrified of what will happen when the truth is revealed, but who cares? I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

"Squeak! (Then first, I shall show you an example!)"

Len, in mouse form, hops upward, then spins around once in midair.

And then, the moment she lands, a young girl is standing there, wearing clothing that looks like an unlined kimono, a little big for her.

She has black hair, but with hints of blue reminiscent of her scales. Her skin is as white as snow. She also has big, almond-shaped eyes. She's cute enough that she'd 100 percent be a beauty in the future, but since she's currently a little girl, I don't feel anything.

"How was that? If you master this technique, you'll be able to transform with clothing included as well. I hope you learn it swiftly so we can then mate."

I have no intention of mating with you, but I do want to learn the technique quickly!

"Arwf, arwf? (*What exactly should I do to learn it?*) "

"Ah, yes... As shape-shifting is high-level magic, the spell is quite complicated. I doubt you'll have any problems, considering you can use ultimate destruction magic, but still..."

"Arwf? (*Huh? I didn't realize that laser beam was such a complicated spell.*) "

And here I thought it was just a barf beam!

"Not only is it difficult, it is inefficient. It takes time to weave the spell, for one thing, and if your opponent runs away while you build up mana, you will be helpless. To make matters worse, it expends a lot of mana; one shot and you'll be dry. It may be useful for attacking castle fortifications, but there are plenty of other more efficient spells for that purpose. In terms of its raw power, it is certainly the strongest, but frankly speaking, there is no practical use for it."

Huh. It's only good for the wow factor, then. I can make the beam narrower and stuff to use it for subtler tasks, though, so it seems pretty handy to me.

"How exactly do you use magic, anyway? You seem to fire beams in succession quite easily, but I've never actually seen you cast the spell. How do you activate it?"

"Arwf? (*Huh? I just, uhh, will it.*) "

I sort of howl while imagining myself throwing up, and then it comes out.

"...That...is exceedingly nonsensical."

Len's shoulders slump in disappointment, her kimono sliding down one shoulder.

"Well, I suppose we've always known how much of a monster you are."

That's rude. How could you call a cute little pupper like me a *monster*?

"However, if you can't weave the spell yourself, then having me cast it on you would be the fastest option. I would need you to stock up on mana in advance, but I'm sure you would have no problems at all."

That's how she did it with Mare, too. I'll take the easy way, please and thank you.

"Very well, then! We shall do it now!"

"Arwf! (*Great! Bring it!*) "

"King of the Fen Wolves, Rوتا Fenrir! Envision thy desired form and receive my magic!"

Wait, is *that* my full name?

Possibly because of the stray thoughts about that new discovery, before I knew it, the shining magic circle Len creates engulfs me before a flash of light snaps a moment later.

The smoke billows and drifts before eventually clearing.

"Woof, woof?! (*How did it go? Did I change?!*) "

"...No, it was a failure. You were thinking something unnecessary, weren't you?"

It's your fault for suddenly giving me a really edgy-sounding name!

"We will try again. This time, place the form you wish for *firmly* in your mind's eye."

"Arwf! (Great! I'll do it as many times as it takes!)"

Len's spell activates again, and a flash of light brightens the forest.

"...Arwf! (How about that? It went perfectly that time, didn't it?!)"

"You haven't changed in the slightest. Shape-shifting into a different race is indeed difficult. Humans in particular are frail, and for one born mighty such as you, it may be hard to imagine a human form."

Actually, I was human before reincarnating, so it's pretty easy for me to imagine that.

"But we shall overcome these trials and change you into a human no matter the cost—so that we can mate!"

Len's been barking up the wrong tree this entire time. I never said I wanted to turn into a human. Not even once.

In reality, the shape-shifting technique hasn't actually been failing. To others, it may look like nothing's happening, but it's steadily approaching success.

"Heh-heh. I wonder what form you will have when you become human. Well, my love for you would never wane no matter what appearance you took on, but I am boundlessly curious. We must hurry and succeed!"

Len puts her hands on her cheeks, wiggling around in excited embarrassment.

I want to give her spoilers, but if my plot is revealed, she might not want to use the technique on me anymore. I'll leave her in the dark for now.

"Grw? (Princess of Dragons, is this talk of our king lusting for humans true?)"

A voice comes from behind Len.

Oh? It's Garo. Seems like she came to check on us. With boot camp training over, she appears to have turned off her drill sergeant mode, too.

"Grwf, grwf. (Ah, I see. It would make sense, then, that our king would not react to Lady Garo's beauty. I had

thought it strange, that he could not so much as discern her gender, much less judge her appearance...) ”

Garo’s watchdog, the old wolf Bal, is there with her.

You may call it weird, Bal, but I just don’t have the special ability to tell male wolves from female ones at a glance. My aesthetic sense is still human.

“Grwf, grwf. (In that case, why don’t we have Lady Garo, too, learn the art of shape-shifting? With her in human form, His Majesty could then provide his seed as well. Lady Garo is the most beautiful of all the Fen Wolves, after all. She is likely to be just as beautiful in human form.) ”

“Gr-grwl... (S-stop that, Bal... You’re being disrespectful to our king...) ”

Garo says that, but as she does, she throws a glance my way.

“Grwl. (However, Bal does have a point. One of our responsibilities is to preserve the king’s bloodline for future generations. My personal feelings have nothing to do with it —nothing at all!) ”

I get the feeling they’re forgetting to ask me about anything as they roll this conversation along.

Garo nods as if to convince herself, then sits in front of Len.

“Wh-what is it...? You would attempt to tear my beloved and me apart? If it is to be a battle of strength, I will face you!”

Swish! Len assumes a strange stance. More importantly, you need to do something about that anxiety. You’re only quick to pick fights because you’re scared.

“Grwl. (Princess of the dragons, your concerns are unfounded.) ”

In contrast to the cautious Len, Garo acts straightforwardly. She speaks to her in a gentle, placating voice.

“Grwl, grwl. (I have no intention of objecting to you and my king becoming mates. The noble bloodline of the king

deserves to be spread far and wide, and not only within the Fen Wolves. However, this is a matter of pride for us Fen Wolves. I would ask you, for the sake of our future, that you please teach your secret arts to me as well.) "

Garó prostrates herself deeply before Len.

"Nnngh... To think a proud Fen Wolf would lower her head to one of another race..."

Actually, all these guys bow all the time.

"If you so insist, then I suppose I must agree. However, I am his lawful wife! I will not budge on that point!"

"Grwl, grwl. (That is fine with me. I name myself as the king's first subject, but I am no more than one wolf organizing the Fen. If I am able to pass on the king's bloodline, my position matters little.) "

Hmmm. I haven't consented to a single part of this, but the women seem to have made up their minds.

"Very well. If you are so prepared, then I must abide. Receive my secret technique, princess of the Fen Wolves!"

Len holds out a hand, and the shape-shifting spell engulfs Garó. Light flashes, and white smoke enshrouds her before eventually fading.

"...So this is a human form? It certainly feels strange to stand on two legs."

Standing there is a black-haired, golden-eyed, brown-skinned beauty. Slender and tall. Lean, compact features. Her jet-black hair trails down her back, an aura of wildness bounding from it.

I see. Her brave, dignified air seems to have been directly carried over into her human appearance.

"Hmm. As expected, you have an aptitude for this. Even I required more than one try to succeed."

"Bow, bow! (Truly a technique possible because of your love, Lady Garó!) "

"B-Bal... S-stand down..."

Garó getting flustered now that she's a brown-skinned beauty is actually incredibly cute. Cool and calm beauties

getting embarrassed and stuff is the best.



...Wait! This isn't good. Not good at all. I never planned to settle down and get *married*.

"M-my king... What are your thoughts? Does this form please you?"

Garō walks over to me, her gait unsteady and inexperienced. As though the shape-shifting subtly failed, wolf ears poke from her hair, and a bushy tail extends from her rear end. Plus, her unsteady way of walking makes me want to protect her. It's a total knockout.

That was close. If I were a furry, I might have keeled over and died right then and there.

"My king...?"

"A-arwf? (*I...guess it's good?*) "

The fully naked, dark-skinned beauty is just too much stimulation for a pure boy like me.

"Bow, bow! (*This is your chance, Lady Garō! Go on the offensive! Like a huntress, sharp and fierce, shall you take the king's heart!*) "

Damn you, Bal! Quit saying stuff you don't need to. Garō is actually gonna go for it!

"M-my king... P-please, look this way..."

As Garō leans coquettishly toward me, her eyes watering, I defend against her, desperately averting my gaze.

"Mgh, mrrrgh! This is an entirely different reaction than the one you gave me when I shape-shifted! What is the meaning of this?!"

Len stomps her foot, immediately regretting having given Garō the shape-shifting technique.

"Meeeow. (*Now, now, Lady Len. Please, calm down.*) "

"I cannot remain calm! Are you not frustrated as well, Nahura?! Have you not gone on about him being your lover and whatnot?! I will teach you the shape-shifting technique as well, so that you may take him back! At this rate, the Fen Wolf princess will have him all to herself!"

Actually, I don't remember any of you owning me. I'm my own dog. More specifically, if we're gonna talk about whom I

belong to, the only answer would be Lady Mary.

"Mew-mrow. (*Routa is a good-for-nothing, so I don't think you really need to worry so much about him. And I may look like a normal familiar, but I was made from alchemical essences. I can transform into a human without anyone's help.*) "

"Wh-what?! You know of a different system of magic than I do?! I would very much like to see that!"

"Mew? (*You really want to see it that much? Well, if you insist. I'll make an exception just for you.*) "

The dumb cat calling people good-for-nothings assumes some sort of stance in front of the keenly interested Len.

"Meeeeow. (*Okay, here I go!*) " Nahura meows loudly.

As I'm wondering what sort of magic she'll use, her back suddenly *splits wide open* .

What bursts from within is a grotesque, red mass of flesh. It wriggles, sprouting tentacles, multiplying across Nahura's back.

"Arwf?! (*What's with the sudden body horror?!*) "

The spectators break out into a cold sweat as the unannounced splatter theater unfolds.

The fleshy lump turns inside out, swallowing up Nahura, pulsing as it changes form. My brain immediately applies a pixilation filter over the whole thing. It's all a terrible, squishy mess. This is just like a failed human transmutation! The kind that gets you called to *that* gate!

The adorable cat is nowhere to be seen, and now a human-shaped monster with half its joints bent in the wrong directions closes in on us—the kind that would make even an exorcist turn white in the face.

"Ar-arrrrrwf?! (*Eeeeeeeeeek?! It's walking on its back?!*) "

It's throbbing! I swear to God it's throbbing!

I'm glued in place by sheer terror.

The impending monster, steam hissing from it quietly, changes its shape even further.

The twisted joints move into their proper positions, white skin appears over the exposed body, and the disheveled hair comes together neatly.

“Hee-hee-hee. How was that, Routa? I’m pretty cute even human-shaped, aren’t I?”

Nahura, now rubbing up against me, has morphed into a cute girl with cat ears. Her body, however, is covered in a mysterious sticky fluid.

“.....”

“What’s the matter, Routa? You froze. Could it be you’re bewitched by my beauty?”

I look at Nahura as she moves her body sinuously, and then—I pass out.

“M-my love?!”

“M-my king?!”

“Wait, whaaat?! That’s a little rude, don’t you think?!”

Too many things happening at once made my brain deflate like a flat tire.



Once I regained consciousness, I practiced the shape-shifting technique many times under the watchful eyes of Nahura and Garo, both who had changed into animal girls, and Len, who had taken the form of a young human girl.

“Little one, why don’t we take a break?”

“Arwf! *(No, just a little longer, please! I feel like I’m about to make a breakthrough!)*”

“Ohhh, to think I would see the day when you put your heart and soul into something...! How gallant, how manly! It makes my heart flutter!”

I’d rather it not.

Still, like I said, I’m definitely getting the hang of the art of shape-shifting. It’s the mental image. The crucial part of

the spell is how strong an image you can hold in your head when you do it.

Len and the others have technically turned into humans, but it's hard to call their technique perfect considering the leftover ears and tails. It's because they were dragged down by the images of what they're supposed to look like. Pushing that away and vividly imagining your transformed self—that's the path to success.

"Arwf! (Do it, Len! I know for sure I can do it this time!)"

"What spirit! You must very much want to mate with me!"

No, not at all, but knock yourself out.

Len's magic engulfs me, and light brighter than any thus far illuminates our surroundings. I squint against the radiance, and when it disappears, there I stand. My true self.

"Mgh, another failure... 'Tis unfortunate, but you must not give up. I will prepare for our next attempt—"

"Arrrwf!! (I did it! It worked!!)"

I cut Len off with a howl of joy.

It's perfect. No doubt. The shape-shifting spell was a complete success.

"...What are you saying? Your shape hasn't shifted at all, has it?"

"She's right," says Nahura. "You don't look any different than before."

"My king, perhaps you should take a short rest...?"

Hey, quit acting like I'm loopy from exhaustion.

"Woof, woof! (Look closely. I'm totally different!)"

Len sighs. "So you say. What about you is different?" she asks, toddling toward me, her kimono dragging behind her. She looks up at me.

And then a look of sudden understanding comes over her face.

"You've grown smaller?!"

You got it.

My current form is my previous one, before I accidentally grew so much. Or, more concretely, I've shape-shifted to what I looked like before I got so fat. My proportions all shrank by the same amount, so from afar, they probably couldn't tell.

I'm such a perfect size that I want to give myself a pat on the back. If I got greedy and went too small, that would actually make the people at the mansion suspicious in its own right. Getting the balance right sure was tricky.

Now I'll always be able to interact with Toa, and even if I get fat again, it won't change how I look because of the shape-shifting spell. Now I can eat all the food I want without having to worry.

"What... What is the meaning of this, beloved...?" inquires Len in a quivering voice. "Wh-what happened to all that about changing into a human and mating with us?"

"Arwf? (Huh? I never said a word about any of that. Oh, what a terrible misunderstanding. Anyway, let's go home.)"

In high spirits, I start on the way home, leaving the women behind me baffled.

"How... How... How dare you dash the hopes of a maiden!! I shall not forgive this!!"

Len spouts fire, shifting from her young girl form into a giant blue dragon.

"A-arrwf!! (Hey—stop that, stupid! It's hot! No, stop!)"

"GAROROROOOOOON!! (I shall not forgive this! I will not forgive it!! The price for your sin of deceiving a woman is grave indeed!!)"

H-Hey! Nahura! Garo! What are you doing?! Get out of the peanut gallery and help me!

"Can't defend you this time, unfortunately!"

"My king, this is just too cruel..."

Nahura folds her hands behind her head and grins, while Garo's shoulders droop in disappointment.

"GAROROROROOOOOON!! (Wait! Stop!! Stop, you!!)"

"Arrwf! (Waaahhh! I'm sooorrerrrryyy!)"

My game of tag with Len continues until we get back to the mansion.



“Woof, woof!! (Lady Mary! Everyone! I’m hooome!!) ”

After somehow talking Len down and having her go back to being a mouse, I bark outside the mansion, calling for everyone.

When I do, the mansion doors immediately open and the young lady comes bursting out of them.

“Routa!! You came back!!”

Yay, it’s Lady Mary. Lady Mary!

I leap over the gates and run to her as fast as my legs can carry me.

Just before I run into her, I assume a sitting position to jam on the brakes and catch her with my fluffy fur.

“Routa, Routaaa... I thought you didn’t like being here anymore...”

As she sniffles, Lady Mary hugs me really tight.

I left the mansion yesterday morning, which means I’ve been gone for a full day. It looks like I’ve made her feel pretty lonely.

“Whine, whine. (I’m sorry, Lady Mary. I’m sorry!) ”

But, look—look, Lady Mary! As you can see, I’ve gotten my slim shape back!

After the young lady, the rest of the mansion’s denizens come over to us.

“Look at how much you’ve made Mary cry. I thought you were a better man than that, Routa.”

Papa starts rubbing my and the young lady’s heads, seeming relieved.

“Arwf, arwf. (Papa, I’m sorry for breaking the bed and the mansion.) ”

"What's that? You're worried about damaging the mansion? No need to worry. I ordered materials and a craftsman right away, and they came via airship. At times like these, I'm really glad to be in the merchant business."

"Well, I would have preferred a little more time with the young lady. It reminded me of when she was little."

Miranda giggles. Since Lady Mary's bed was broken, she must have slept in Miranda's last night.

"Wow, Routa, you're so thin now!"

"You're right. That's a lot of weight to lose in only one day."

"...So slim."

Right? You maids can take a good look at my wonderful body, too. I can even get through the mansion's doors with ease now.

"Lady Mary, I just informed Mr. James! He says the meal is ready."

Toa approaches, out of breath. I assume her lateness is because she went to tell the old man that I was back first.

My eyes almost start leaking tears from Toa's kindness. Also, my mouth almost starts leaking drool. I'm *seriously* hungry.

"Oh, that's right! Routa, we need to feed you! Let's go!"

"Woof, woof! (*Yay! Food time! It's been a whole day since I've had the old man's cooking!*) "

As Lady Mary breaks into a run, I follow her, and we head for the old man's kitchen.

As soon as we step from the hallway into the kitchen, I'm surrounded by delightful culinary aromas that make me feel like I'm on my way to heaven.

"Well, look at you! You've certainly trimmed down. Try to be more reasonable with your outings, though. Everyone worries about you. I figured you'd be returning soon, though, so I got a meal ready for you."

"Arrrwwf! (*Yes! I love you, old man!*) "

After that, I stuff my belly with the old man's cooking, and when night comes, I go to sleep with the young lady in a bed that's wider and sturdier than ever before.

And that's how I got my regular life back.



Incidentally, Redarmor's story continued after his defeat at the hands of Routa and the others.

"Gh... Gohh...? (*What... What was I...? I thought that white Fen Wolf killed me...*)"

He realized through the haziness of his consciousness that he was still alive after being hunted and supposedly killed.

When he opened his heavy eyelids, the glaring summer sunlight stabbed at his eyes.

"Finally awake?"

A voice came from nearby. Redarmor abruptly got up and took a cautious stance.

"Nice reflexes."

The voice belonged to a young human woman with brown skin. No, she had big ears and a thick tail. Characteristics of Fen Wolves. This woman was a shape-shifted Fen Wolf.

He didn't know why she'd wanted to change into a human, but before even that, he had been unable to understand the situation he was currently in. He'd challenged the Fen Wolves to battle, and he'd been defeated easily. His being alive like this should have been an impossibility.

"Hmm. By the looks of it, you still don't appear to have been taken over by the excess mana. You've made the power your own, without letting yourself be swallowed by it. You have talent."

Redarmor's caution intensified at the woman's appraising stare.

"Gohrrr? (Why didn't you finish me off...? Those who are defeated in battle are consumed. It's the only rule of the wild.) "

"Oh, no reason in particular. I just thought I'd give you one more chance now that you've lost. You are inexperienced, and a fool, but your courage in challenging us by yourself is admirable. However, simply swinging power around wildly does not require skill. You and your greed-stained personality both—I will thoroughly reforge them."

And then the Fen Wolf elites, all in a line, bared their fangs to welcome the arrival of a new green recruit.

""Grwl, grwl! (Welcome to the Fen Wolf training grounds!) ""

"Rejoice, Redarmor, for we will make you, too, into a Fen Wolf. And we shall start by instilling in you an absolute loyalty to King Routa."

"G-gohhh?! (Wh-what?!) "

"Grwl. (Don't worry. We will teach you everything.) "

At Garo's signal, the Fen Wolves penned Redarmor in.

"G-gooaaahhhhh?! (St-stop! I don't want that...! Ggyaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh?!) "

It appeared the forest-ravaging invader would soon become a new ally to the Fen Wolves...

It's a peaceful afternoon as I doze in the study.

I've successfully shrunk my overgrown body down to its previous size, one with which I can just barely insist I'm a dog, and now I'm even lying at Papa's feet like everything's normal. I feel exactly like a rich person's dog should.

Papa's study is quiet and cool, and I recently realized that makes it a perfect place for an afternoon nap. The rainy season is over, and it's gotten hotter, meaning it's harder to go outside the mansion these days. But here, I've found a pretty great spot.

The sound of Papa's pen writing on his documents is a good lullaby; it lulls me to sleep. And occasionally he'll pet me as though he's just remembered I'm here, which is nice. It seems to me this will be my favorite spot for afternoon naps for a while. Papa, for his part, is handling piles of documents, so maybe petting me is a good distraction for him.

Miranda stands quietly by his side. She readies any materials Papa needs before he even asks, puts on a new pot of tea before the old one gets cold, and, if she has time, tidies up without making a sound. She's the perfect maid. Toa has been looking after Lady Mary more and more recently, so it seems Miranda is helping Papa with her

newfound free time. She sure is skillful at assisting him, though. Maybe this was her real job all along.

“Miranda?”

“These documents, sir?”

“Miranda?”

“One spoonful of sugar for your tea, sir?”

Miranda is just too competent. For some time now, her name is the only word that’s been coming out of Papa’s mouth.

I idle my time away, watching the two of them work. No matter how much I sleep, nobody will ever criticize me. I’m allowed to do it. After all, I’m a pet. Getting coddled is my job. And clerical work definitely isn’t!

Hya-ha! My past as a corporate slave? Ancient history! Three cheers for pet life.

“Phew. I’ve made a lot of progress on my work today. Maybe it’s because Routa is here.”

Wait, really? I’m a net benefit? If petting me is refreshing for you, then you can pet me all you want.

I lean into Papa’s hand as he pats me on the head.

Still, Papa, you’ve been working nonstop since morning. Maybe you should take a break already. It really seems like you work way too much.

I can’t remember ever seeing him relaxing. Even on that trip to the Royal Capital, he only joined Lady Mary and the rest of the sightseeing group at the very end. I worry he’ll die of overwork like I did in my past life.

“Master, why not take a short break?”

As if to manifest my thoughts, Miranda prompts him to take a breather.

“Yeah, maybe you’re right... And that one’s done. Miranda, shall we finish up those documents over there next?”

“...You’re not listening,” Miranda grumbles with a sigh, mildly appalled.

Even her sigh doesn't seem to have made it to Papa, though. He takes another document, quickly scans the contents, and signs it before moving on to the next one.

Papa is an abnormally busy person, being a marquis out on the frontier and also a wealthy merchant—both jobs that require a lot of hard work. He probably built this mansion deep in the mountains, so far from civilization, for his once-sickly daughter. It must be a lot easier to do this type of work in the capital, where people congregate.

But Papa doesn't do that. No matter how busy he is, he always scrapes together time to eat with Lady Mary, and he tries hard to somehow make time for family affairs. Of course, as a result, he leads an unhealthy lifestyle of heavy drinking and sleep deprivation.

And as part of the family myself, I find myself seriously worrying about his health. But he can't understand what I say, and as his servant, Miranda would never be too firm with him.

Old man James, his friend from way back, is probably the closest in position to him in the mansion, but he works as hard as Papa, if not even harder. I hope the old man takes a break soon—he might collapse. Not only does he provide all the mansion's food, he even takes care of the horses doing work in the fields.

Hmm. No matter how I think about it, the men in this mansion work too hard. If only there were someone, somewhere, who could tell them off for me.

And just as I was wondering about it, it happened.

"You've been worrying everyone so much, Gandolf. What a bad boy you are."

No sooner do I hear that rebuke than Hecate flutters down into the study on the wind.

That's right—Hecate can do it! She's the mansion's main doctor, a grand magician, and the one who knows Papa's weaknesses from when he was young. Papa and the old man would *have* to listen to her.

"Arwf! (Tell him, Hecate!)"

When I give her a yell, she returns it with a wink, as if to say, "Leave it to me."

"Doc... Dr. Hecate! Please say something before coming around like that!" cries Papa, blaming her as he scrambles to catch the documents the wind blew around.

"What would be the point then? If I didn't come unannounced, I'd never know what kind of life you're living. You can't get out of this by pretending to be healthy when I'm here. I'm your doctor, after all."

Her argument is sound. But what's also sound is the fact that *she* always suddenly shows up with spatial magic, startling me. Yes, I'm talking about the meal moocher you're supposed to be looking after. Her abruptly appearing on my back is bad for my heart. Please feed her the proper food yourself like you're supposed to. Nahura even has a phobia of sweet things now, after all the failed sweets you make her eat.

Both my critical stare and Papa's voice, however, are then shut down.

"Your manner of living is inexcusable."

As Papa is still trying to finish the paperwork, Hecate steals his pen using levitation magic.

"Doctor's orders, Gandolf. Today you are to do nothing but rest. For the entire day. Not just you, either—you're going to make today a holiday for everyone at the mansion."

"What?! I mean, I can't just... The servants have their own work arrangements. Won't suddenly giving them a day off put them in a troubling spot?" says Papa as he tries to snatch the pen back; it continues to flutter around and avoid him.

"Please leave that to me, Master. The maids and I have already finished our work for tomorrow ahead of schedule," Miranda tells him, smiling. "And the same applies for you. Those documents earlier were the last records to be done today."

Oh. There were some behind-the-scenes dealings beforehand, huh? Miranda was probably helping with Papa's job all morning so that he'd finish early.

As the two women smile at him, Papa leans back in his chair in resignation and loosens his bolo tie. "I surrender. Maybe I *have* been too preoccupied with work lately. If you've put in all this work for it, then I can't exactly refuse. Please tell the others they are to fully enjoy a day of rest."

As soon as Papa says that, the door to the study opens and maids flood through.

"Yes! Way to go, Master! We've been wanting to go spend time at the lake!"

"Thank you, Lady Hecate. I'm looking forward to the latest in swimsuit attire from the capital."

"...Time to swim. A lot."

Beginning with Connie, Mira, and Betty, the three girls I recently met, the maids form a circle around Hecate, talking about their plans for the holiday. They seem to have decided on going to the lake already. We'll certainly be fine there, even with so many people going.

"Routa, Routa! Let's play a lot today!"

The young lady jumps up and down, holding my front legs as I sit.

"Arwf, arwf! (*Awesome! Playing in the water is the most fun thing to do on hot days!*) "

The once-quiet study is now filled with the high-pitched voices of the female staff.

And then we began to prepare for everyone at the mansion to go to the lake.



"Have a good time," says the old gardener, the only one staying at the mansion, as he sees us off. He politely refused to come, saying the best break for him was to relax while

gazing at the garden, so it's out of our hands. Not leaving *anyone* to mind the place while we're gone might have come back to bite us in the butt anyway.

""""Bye!""""

The maids wave goodbye to the old man from inside the carriage. Normally they solemnly and skillfully go about their duties. On their days off, however, they really start frolicking.

Both the maids and the food supplies are on board the large horse-drawn carriage pulled by our very own black horse, Mare, with James gripping the reins. The others are riding on the usual coach pulled by Elusive and Grace, horse husband and wife. Zenobia is their driver, and Papa is inside the coach with Hecate, the latter preaching to the former to reduce his workload a little more.

As for me, I'm walking alongside the carriages with Lady Mary on my back. Now that boot camp has retrained my body, I feel light as the wind. Carrying the young lady is like carrying nothing at all.

Man, it's fun to run.

"Don't you dare drop Lady Mary, you hear me?" warns Zenobia from her coachman seat.

"Hee-hee." Lady Mary hugs me tightly. "You'd never drop me, right, Routa?"

That's good—as long as you're grabbing me like that, you'll never fall.

"I know! Let's all have a race to the lake! Do your best, Routa!"

"Woof, woof! (*Great! Leave it to me!*) "

I speed up a little bit, making sure the young lady stays on my back.

"Hey, wait! I just got done saying..."

"Whinny. (*Oh my. The children are so energetic.*) "

"Whicker! (*Well, we haven't lost yet, either!*) "

Elusive and Grace raise their own speed to match my acceleration. Both of them are full of energy despite their

age.

“W-wait, we shouldn’t go too fast...!”

Not happening, Zenobia. After all, although you’ve convinced yourself you know how to drive the coach, all you’re really doing is holding on to the reins. Elusive and Grace are intelligent; they’re considering everything by themselves, from operating the coach to staying on course toward the destination.

“Neeigh! *(You all look like you’re having fun! I’ll join in, too!)* ”

Mare, pulling the large luggage-laden carriage, rapidly increases her speed.

“Oh, not bad,” says the old man, impressed by Mare’s horsepower. “All right—we’ve made sure everything is tied down in here. We can go as fast as we want! Have at it!”

The maids let out yelps as the old man, instead of stopping Mare, lets her go as fast as she wants.

“Chef!” calls Betty. “All this carriage bouncing is making my butt hurt!”

“Gah-ha-ha! That’s because it ain’t thick enough! You should try eating more meat!”

“Nobody asked you!”

As the carriage barrels forward, Betty flings herself at the old man.

And so our dirt race to the finish line—the lake—begins.



“Agh, my butt hurts...”

“Are you all right, Betty?”

“How are you all fine?”

“...Well, it’s because we’re thicker there—”

“Not that again! ...Ugh. Toa, you’re the only one who understands my pain... Let’s form a pancake alliance!” says Betty as she rubs her bottom and leans against Toa.

“Huh? I didn’t find it especially painful, either...”

“You... You traitor! Are you in the middle of a growth spurt?! Is that it, you little...!”

“Eek! W-watch where you’re touching me!”

The maids all get along pretty well, huh?

As the group of women hurriedly prepares for the holiday by putting up parasols, laying down blankets, and such, I lie sprawled out in the shade.

Help them? I’m a pet dog. What do you want from me?

“To think we’d be wearing these swimsuits again...”

“Yes, it still takes a little bit of courage... The master and Lord James said they’d go to the other bank to fish out of consideration, though, so...at least we don’t have any men looking at us.”

Zenobia and Miranda are melancholic as they unfold their risqué bathing suits.

Papa and the old man said it would be too stimulating for them, so they left together to go fishing. I don’t know where they’d been keeping them, but they had real nice fishing poles ready to go. Seems like they’ll actually enjoy the holiday a lot.

They finish setting up shortly, and everyone starts to relax wherever they feel like. Some go swimming, some sunbathe, some play card games in the shade—everyone has their own way of having fun.

Everyone’s wearing a swimsuit, too, because Hecate went to the Royal Capital to buy one for each person. As always, she spares no expense when it comes to entertainment.

“Squeak! (Cease this! My beloved is the only one permitted to do as he pleases with my body!) ”

“Mrrrow. (You have a long way to go, Lady Len. Compared to being Mistress Hecate’s test subject, this is like heaven.) ”

Nahura and Len have been captured by the maids, who normally don’t get a chance to coddle them during their

day-to-day work, and now they're being mobbed. The maids are touching and petting and kissing them, all to a continuous chorus of the word *cute* used in one way or another. Len, squeaking madly, is trying to flee, but Nahura seems used to it; she remains mostly listless, letting them have their way.

I left that ring of maids at the first opportunity, and now I'm floating in the water to cool off. I'm happy to let the maids shower me with attention, but we've come all the way to the lake. It'd be a waste not to swim.

The young lady and the others are playing in the water nearby. Lady Mary, appearing to have just thought of something, whispers in Zenobia's ear, and Zenobia nods in agreement.

"Here we go, then, my lady!"

"Okay! You can start!"

"Up we go!"

Zenobia picks up the young lady, who has brought her knees up to her chest, then launches her away with one hand. Lady Mary spins as she flies through the air before cleanly splashing down again.

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! That's fun! That's really fun!" she cries out in jubilation after getting her head back above the water. Apparently she isn't able to swim, but in a very Mary-like way, she doesn't fear the water whatsoever.

"L-Lady Mary!" Toa, who also can't swim, blanches as she watches them from the shallows. "Lady Mary, that kind of game seems dangerous!"

"Oh, you mean you don't know, Toa?" says Lady Mary with a blank look directly at Toa, who wants to somehow get her out of the water. "Games are fun *because* they're dangerous."

She knew it was dangerous, and she still did it. A premeditated crime, then. Toa looks ready to faint from her master's aggressive words.

Well, Zenobia is watching her, so she won't drown or anything. It looks like the day Toa becomes a maid who can excellently accompany her lady is still a long way off.

As I'm thinking about it and drifting across the lake, I suddenly find I've ended up floating over near Zenobia.

"Mm. This is pretty good training. The young lady's body is unfortunately too light, but still..."

"Arwf. *(You can already hurl a person with one hand. That's not enough?)* "

What's gonna happen if she trains even more? What do gorillas even evolve into?

"What? Did you want to join in, too?"

"Arwf?! *(Huh?! No, absolutely not, no thank you!)* "

"Don't be shy. You should be heavy enough to weigh me down."

I thought we'd finally communicated successfully for the first time in a while, but I couldn't even get her to listen to me.

Zenobia violently grabs my hind legs.

"Gooooooooo!!"

"Arrrrrrwf!! *(Noooooooooooo!!)* "

She hurls me like Murofushi might send a hammer spinning through the air.

"Arrrrwf! *(Too much foooooorce!)* "

"Wow, Routa, that's amazing!"

"Isn't... Isn't that a little far?"

I sail over Lady Mary's and Toa's heads, flying, flying, flying...

Wait, aren't I on a direct collision course with the opposite shore?

What a gorilla! She's really made the moniker her own. Such arm strength.

Anyway, I'm scared of crashing into the ground like this, so I splay my limbs out to add to the air resistance, weakening my momentum. Then I do a twirl in midair and land on the far shore.

"Arwf, arwf, arwf! (Ten points, ten points, ten points, ten points, ten points—a perfect score!)"

I strike a dashing pose. That was a wonderful landing, if I do say so myself.

"Arwf... (Ahh, that scared me. Did she even hold back with that throw?)"

If I'd screwed up the landing, I'd have been buried in the ground, a me-shaped silhouette left on the surface. I can easily see that having happened.

"Arwf, arwf. (I could swim back, but I'd rather not get thrown like that again.)"

Now that I'm over here anyway, I'll go look for Papa and the old man. They said they'd be fishing on the far shore, so they should be around here somewhere.

"Heeey, Routa! Over here!"

I turn to see the old man, wearing a straw hat, waving in my direction. His and Papa's faces are beet red—have they already started drinking?

"Woof, woof! (No fair. Let me have some, too!)"

They have a chunk of ice, probably something Hecate made with magic, and a small cask is inside. They've been quaffing from it while they fish.

Well, if you drink too much again and she gets mad at you for your uric acid levels going up, don't come crying to me. Instead, I, your loyal dog, will do you the favor of drinking the cask dry. I beseech you, good sirs—the beer!

I sit between them as their feet soak in the edge of the water. The fishing poles, hanging over the shore, haven't even budged.

"Arwf? (How's it going, you two? Are they biting today?)"

I peer into their bucket of water. Nothing's in there yet.

"Arwf, arwf. (Oh, come on. Can't you do better than that?)"

"Why are you looking at us like that? We're after a big one," boasts the old man as he pours me some more beer. "If any small fry bite, we let 'em go."

“Arrrwf? (Reaaaaally? You’re not being a sore loser?) ”

As I look at them suspiciously, Papa smiles and continues for the old man. “When I was young, I nearly caught something huge in this lake.” His eyes grow distant, as though he’s relishing the nostalgic memory. “I’d only just met Marianna at the time. She insisted I take her outside her mansion and bring her somewhere to have fun, but as the son of a poor merchant, this was the only kind of fun I knew.”

Oh? Marianna—that was Lady Mary’s mother, right?

And Papa, lord of the mansion, is a poor merchant’s son? What’s that all about? Wasn’t he born into nobility?

“Back then, I would’ve never guessed Gandolf would end up being a noble. He was always too nervous to be alone with her, so he’d beg for me to come along. What a no-good fellow!”

“And I never thought that apprentice cook who picked fights at the drop of a hat would end up being the youngest royal head chef in history.”

The two men, who know each other’s past, roar with laughter.

I see—Papa married into it. That would mean the Faulks name and noble bloodline belonged to Marianna rather than him. Their pasts are probably filled with unknown drama.

“I remember that time—Marianna wouldn’t let go until the very end. If you hadn’t been there to stop her, she’d have been pulled right in.”

“It seems like Mary definitely inherited that tomboy’s blood.”

“Yes, the young lady reminds me more of Marianna with every passing year.”

Papa begins to snifle. “Marianna... Mary is growing up wonderfully...”

“This again? Oh, stop crying.”

The old man hits Papa—who has turned into a maudlin drunk—on the back a few times.

These two have such a good relationship. Normally they're always so respectful toward each other with their jobs, but when it's just the two of them, they can be their true selves and deepen their friendship.

In addition, as I am a pet, I'm not part of that number.

"Arwf, arwf... (*By the way...*) "

"Eh? What's the matter?"

"Arwf. (*The pole has been moving for a while.*) " I pointedly gesture with my nose toward the pole that's about to be dragged into the lake.

"H-hey! You've got a bite, Gandolf!"

"N-nghhh?!" Papa hastily grabs his fishing pole and tries to pull it back. "This, this bite... It has to be! It's the same one from back then!"

"What?! It's finally come?! Reel it in, Gandolf! Settle the score from so many years ago!"

"Ngghhh! Marianna, I hope you're watching!"

Papa and the old man grip the pole and pull with all their might.

"Arrrf, arrrf! (*Hooray, hooray, you can do it!*) "

I watch them go as I drink my beer.

"Routa! What do you think you're doing?! Quit watching and give us a hand!" demands the old man, his face bright red.

It seems like we're up against quite the catch. The thick pole is bending like it's about to snap in half, and the two of them are being slowly dragged toward the lake.

"Arrrf. (*Well, if you insist. Time for the main performer to enter the stage.*) "

I leisurely walk over, then bite down on the pole, below where Papa and the old man are holding.

"Arwgh! (*Ready? I'm gonna pull it!*) "

An instant before I really dig in and tug, the fish's force intensifies.

"Dwah?!"

"What?!"

The sudden yank sends Papa and the old man diving into the lake.

“Arwgh?! (*Hey—what?!*) ”

I didn’t let go of the pole, but I got instantly dragged deep enough into the lake that the water now comes up to my face.

“Ghhhrgh...! (*Oh, great, I’m gonna drown...!*) ”

I can see past the curtain of light into the lake; there’s a giant fish desperately raging to escape the fishhook. That thing is *crazy* huge. Papa and the old man were right—it’s gotta be the biggest thing living in here.

But then I see something more important.

A glint, past the swimming leviathan. Something clear, reflecting the glow of the sunlight all the way at the bottom of the lake.

Could that be the sacred crystal that appears in the fairy tales the young lady gets told at night? The legends say this crystal has sacred power and wards off monsters, protecting this forest.

Of course, the legends are totally fake. I know the actual defenders of peace in the forest are the talented Fen Wolves led by Garo. They’ve been doing it for a millennium—driving away monsters so they don’t leave the forest, hunting the ones who go berserk.

Wait, then what’s that crystal for? If the story is pure fiction, then how is there factual proof of it sitting at the bottom of the lake?

“Hey, Rوتا! Don’t you dare let go! Pull it up! If this works, we’ll be eating like kings!”

The old man’s appeal snaps me out of it.

Eating?! A freshly caught fish?! Prepared by the old man?!

“Ghhrrrbhbbb! (*Whoaaaaaaa! I’ll reel it in if it kills me!!*) ”

Putting strength into my already exerting limbs, I dig my claws into the ground and rally all my muscles to bring my

face up.

“Arrrrrrrrrrf!! (Graaaahhhhhhhhhhh!! You’re dinneeeeeeeeerrrrrrrrr!!) ”

With all my might, I pull up the fishing pole.

Right when the base of the pole gives out under the force of my bite and shatters, a pillar of water splashes and the fish flies into the air. It soars over my back, then strikes the earth with a loud boom.

“Fantastic work, Routa!”

“Wow, you actually pulled it up! Not bad!”

Papa and the old man emerge from the lake, soaking wet.

“Arwf, arwf! (Heh-heh! Go ahead! Praise me more!) ”

I wag my tail and go out to meet them.

“Now, let’s take a gander at the biggest—and most difficult—fish this lake had to offer!”

The giant fish flails, its tail fin flapping madly. It’s an enormous trout, over two meters long.

“Now *this* is what I call a catch.”

It’s the biggest thing in there. No doubt about it. What incredible presence I feel from it.

With this they’ve safely caught the fish and settled their score, but what are we going to do with it? It’s such a big fish. Are we going to let it go?

I look up at the old man’s face. He smirks.

“We’re eating it, of course!”

Thought so!

“What’s the point in fishing if you don’t eat your catch? If you want to eat, then fish—and if you want to fish, then eat! It’s how we show respect for life.”

“I... I see. I figured we were just going to throw it back...”
Papa is a little taken aback by the old man’s wild opinion.

“Great! I’ll start a fire! I’ll keep it simple with this trout—we’re having it salted and grilled!”

“Arrrrrrw! (Woo-hoo! I love grilled fish!!) ”

“Routa, you fill the bucket with water! Gandolf, get the plates ready!”

“R-right. It’s been a long time since we’ve hung out like this. I’m so glad I took the day off. I’ll have to thank everyone.”

And so the old man neatly filleted the giant trout, then took the big slices, put them on skewers, and slowly grilled them over the bonfire.

The skin is crunchy, and the flesh is so juicy it’s dripping with grease. As expected, the old man really knows how to cook it just right.

“Awwrr, arrwf! *(This is incredible!! How can simple salted fish possibly taste this good?!)* ”

Ahhh! Now I want some white rice! I want some rice to munch on with the grilled fish! This makes the rice supply even more urgent! Hurry up and get some stocked soon, Papa!

“After playing and sweating that much, the salty flavor is really good, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s very delicious!”

The young lady and Toa sit side by side as they eat their fish skewers.

Sigh. Simply watching them makes it all worth it.

“Yes, this is good. I don’t mind this sort of wilderness meal once in a while.”

“It certainly does taste good. It goes very well with the wine.”

Papa and Hecate, and all the maids, are head over heels for the old man’s fish dish.

I am, too, of course. Getting to wash down the fish fat filling my mouth with beer makes this feel like heaven on earth. Every last bite of the giant trout is eaten, with us fully enjoying our day off.

Hang on a sec. I feel like I’m forgetting something. What was it again? Something I saw in the lake, or...

“Routa! We’re going home now!”

With everything cleaned up, the young lady, having changed out of her swimsuit, waves to me.

"Arwf! (Okay, I'm coming!)"

I run to her side, completely losing my train of thought.

Late one night, a white object rolled along the forest floor.

It was small, like a pebble, getting stuck in little ditches and bouncing off other pebbles, but it kept rolling, as if trying to go somewhere.

The moonlight illuminated the white object until finally one could make out its shape.

A tiny little skull.

It was like a human skeleton had been shrunk down to that size, but only its head was rolling.

Had one of the Fen Wolves been there, they would have known exactly what it was.

It had been burned into their eyes—as well as their stomachs—during that decisive battle in the graveyard.

The skeleton was the one that had been eaten by the Fen Wolves under Rوتا's command, and it shouldn't have existed anymore: the necromancer, Lich.

"Haah, haah... I managed to fake my destruction and sneak my main body out of my all-important graveyard, but now that it's been stolen, I have no mana left with which to repair myself... How many months, how many *years* will it be until I fully restore my strength?"

The skeleton stopped rolling, then looked up at the moon peeking down in the night sky.

“To think one of the Demon Lord’s generals would be defeated so easily... Who in the world was that white Fen Wolf? Enough mana to continuously shoot ultimate destruction magic... Hardy enough to shrug off my attacks... So many wolf soldiers, trained to their absolute best... Strong enough to make *me* fear him. And that wasn’t the only fearsome thing. His abnormal ideas, too—such as killing me, an immortal, by *eating* me...”

Lich’s bony body clattered in fear as he remembered the terrible Fen Wolf and how he had gnashed his fangs to devour him whole.

“Weakened as I am, I would not be much help to the Demon Lord. I’ve no idea how much time it will take to regain my original body... My only choice is to go into hiding to replenish my strength. That white Fen Wolf is one to be feared. That one as great as he was born while we were sealed is a grave situation indeed... Perhaps I should be very cautious in my investigation of how to unseal the Demon Lord as well.”

First he’d need to find a safe place... He hated the idea of any more crows and squirrels chasing him around. Why were they so fascinated by a skull in the first place?

As he muttered these things to himself, his skull form continued rolling through the forest.

Then he was stopped—by a high-heeled boot.

“What?! Who goes there?!”

“Oh? Oh, oh, oh, what’s this? I spotted something terribly unsightly, and who should it turn out to be but *you*, Uncle Lich?”

“That... That voice!”

For him it had felt like a few months. In actual time, however, he had not heard the voice of this cohort in a thousand years, and it had him shocked.

“Carmilla?! You’ve revived as well?!”

The one stepping on Lich was a beautiful girl wearing a mantle over a black dress.



Her golden locks and her bloodred eyes glittered ominously in the night.

Her clothing was an ill fit for so deep in the forest and far from human civilization, but the long fangs protruding from her mouth and the big, bat-like wings extending from her back revealed her to be a monster.

"I have indeed, Uncle. It is I, your beloved comrade and vampire princess, Carmilla."

The girl calling herself Carmilla did a little twirl in place, granting herself an affected sort of elegance.

"But I must say, this is funny. The great necromancer Lich, general of the Demon Lord's army, reduced to something so laughable!"

Knitting her brows, she giggled. Lich was indignant.

"Where... Where have you been this whole time?! If you had been part of the fight, I might not have lost so terribly...!"

"I *wish* you wouldn't ask the impossible. I only woke up just a few days ago, you know. I don't know why the seal was undone, but I *did* fly here in a hurry after I sensed your pitiful magic nearby, Uncle. Though we may be of different races, we are both immortal, so I came here to save you. A little thanks wouldn't kill you."

Lich had to fall silent after that. If Carmilla put a little more force into her heel, she could easily crush him, weakened as he was.

"First, you'll explain the situation. Starting with that teeny-tiny body of yours, hee-hee..."

If his body had contained any blood vessels, they would have been quite visible on his forehead. But Lich restrained his anger and chose to proceed with the conversation in a constructive manner.

"...Fine, then. The path to resurrecting the Demon Lord may be as straightforward as we hoped."

"Oh? Now I'm interested. Why don't you tell me all about it? And instead of letting others get in the way, I'll invite you

to my crystal palace, Uncle.”

After picking up the skull, Carmilla spread her wings and flew off under the moonlight.



Ever since the rainy season ended, the days have been getting hotter and hotter.

I dearly miss the cold water of the lake. And also that delicious, ice-cold beer.

“Hff... Hff... (It’s hot... It’s so hot...)”

It’s not all that bad inside the mansion, but the sunlight outside seems to be stabbing right into me, and moving just a little makes me want to pass out from the heat.

Damn it all. To think the day would come when my fluffy fur worked against me...

“Are you all right, Routa? Do you want some water?”

The ever-considerate Lady Mary has officially switched to summer clothes. Her sleeveless white dress and wide-brimmed straw hat are very cute.

Moments ago we were running around together in the garden; I was the first one the heat did in.

“Oh my. How slovenly.”

I suddenly feel a cold wind blow through, and then Hecate appears before us, sitting on her staff as it floats horizontally in the air.

“Dr. Hecate! Did you come to play?!”

The young lady’s face lights up, and she pounces on Hecate. She must really like her a lot. Maybe she’s all the more attached to her because she doesn’t have a mom.

Of course, Hecate isn’t exactly the mother type—she’s more like a grandma who endlessly dotes on her grandchildren—eep?! Hecate’s looking this way and smiling! Her face is smiling, but her eyes are subzero!

“...My, my. I won’t give you my summer-visit gift if you behave like that.”

Huh? What is it? Did you bring something for me?

I am eagerly awaiting something that will release me from this blazing-hot summer.

“Mary, take a step back, okay?”

Hecate alights from her staff and has me and the young lady move away.

“Nahura, are you ready? Oh! I see you’ve found something just right. Anchor it, then, okay? I’m going to summon you.”

Is she communicating with Nahura from a distance? As she talks, she has her fingers on the accessory on her ear.

“All right, here we go.”

Hecate twirls her staff and points its orb toward the sky.

A hole opens up in midair, and from it something huge gently descends.

“Wow! It’s cold!”

A burst of cold wind rushes through the hole along with the giant object.

“Arwf? *(Is that a clump of ice?)* ”

An ice boulder falls down, then lands in the backyard with a thud.

“Wow, it’s so pretty!”

The young lady draws near and looks up at the icy chunk. Despite its size, you can see right through to the other side. The ice is totally transparent.

“M-mew... *(I... I thought I was going to freeze to death...)* ”

Nahura comes up to me, shivering, snot dripping from her nose. It seems she was the one who went and got this ice.

“Natural ice cut from the areas near the peak of the sacred mountain in the north.”

Whoa. Never heard of it, but that’s incredible. Just being near it makes me supercool. This was a great midsummer

present.

“Whoa! What’s that?!”

The kitchen’s back door leads to the backyard; a shocked old man comes bursting out.

“Ah, Miss Hecate—welcome. This is quite the block of ice.”

He seems to have immediately understood Hecate called it here with magic. He raps his knuckles against the ice, then licks the droplets that stick to his hand, evaluating its flavor.

“Very high-quality natural ice at that. I was just thinking of buying some at the capital. One scoop of this would go for a whole gold coin there.”

Wait, for real? We could get a thousand scoops out of this much ice and it would barely scratch the surface. If we bring it there, we’d be filthy rich.

And yet we’re using it as a stand-in air conditioner? Hecate sure loves to live lavishly.

“Hmm. Miss Hecate, may I have a little of this ice?”

“You may. I see you’ve thought of something.”

“I won’t say anything yet. It would spoil the surprise.”

The old man goes back into the kitchen, then brings out a knife and a small dish.

“Well then, don’t mind if I do.”

He presses the knife against the ice, then smoothly slides it. A moment later, fine powder bursts off the ice’s surface, glittering in the sun.

He catches it in the dish, then continues shaving little pieces off the ice, his movements fluid.

“A-arwf! (*This... This is shaved ice!*) ”

First rice, and now this! I can’t believe I’m seeing such nostalgic foods.

Well, actually, the shaved ice I’m familiar with is the sort sold at festivals, shaved roughly and left to sit so long it hardens. Sure, it’s nice to look at in the beginning, but then the taste makes you sad.

I've never seen such pillowy shaved ice before! I'm very pleased to meet you, yes I am!

It looks delicious, even though I haven't even tried it yet. The ice is so fine it looks like frozen mist. It flutters down onto the plate, light as feathers, and piles up higher and higher. Actually, I didn't think this was how shaved ice was made, but I can't fault the old man, not with his knife skills.

"Still, if you squeezed a fruit on this, it would probably make a very interesting sorbet. The sheer cold might make it difficult for the tongue to taste much, so I'd need to flavor it with something very sweet..."

"Oh my, is that a request of me in particular?"

Hecate can knock even Papa down a peg, but old man James trying to coax her is just what I'd expect from him.

"Okay, then. I'll bring out something from my special reserve."

And his request actually works. Hecate must want to sample his experiment, too.

Aw, so honest with your desires. I have to say I like that about you!

Hecate waves her staff, and several small bottles fall out of the sky.

"This is violet syrup. This one is dew herb. This is golden Osmanthus, and this is bonesetter shrub."

The bottles line up, all hovering via flotation magic, each containing a richly colored syrup.

"They're so pretty...!"

"I have your favorite rose syrup, too, Mary."

Hecate's homemade flower syrups. I've had the rose one before, diluted with water, and that had a great smell and an amazing taste.

Being able to pour it over ice and eat it that way is the height of luxury! Thanks, Hecate!

"Arwf, arwf! (*I want the violet! The purple one!*) "

The thick purple syrup swirls onto the shaved ice, mixing in with it and giving it a pink gradation. It looks refreshing

and delicious.

"Arwf! (Thanks!) "

It doesn't even pop or crunch in my mouth. There's only the sweet flowery aroma and the feeling of refreshing coolness sliding down my throat.

"Arrwf! (What is this? What even is this?! I've never tasted anything like it before—not even remotely!) "

In a few gulps, the shaved ice on the plate disappears, and I lick up the leftover syrup. The pooling liquid is delicious in a completely different way.

"Woof, woof! (Nahura! You try some, too!) "

"M-mewww... (I would be perfectly happy not seeing ice again for a long, long time...) "

It must have been awfully cold for her at the peak of the sacred mountain, because she's lying on the warm stone cobbling, basking in the sunlight. She doesn't even attempt to go near the ice.

"Squeak, squeak. (The chef isn't looking. Quickly, give me some!) "

As soon as I get my seconds, Len pokes out from between my legs.

"Arwf, arwf. (Okay, okay, this one's for you. Eat as much as you want.) "

"S-squeak! (My beloved has shown me consideration...! I am moved by your kindness! Shall we copulate now?!) "

Something like that, Len. Something like that.

The huge chunk of ice still shows no signs of melting, and as we cool off near it, we smack our lips and enjoy the cold sweetness.



“At last, a general of the Demon Lord appeared before the Hero on his journey.”

"Arwf, arwf. (Uh-huh.) "

As we lie on the bed, the young lady reads a book to me. Another part of the legend of the hero Rوتا. She really likes this book, doesn't she?

"The general was named Carmilla, the vampire princess. She was a terrible demon who drank the blood of pure boys and girls. She would appear in villages and towns after night fell, striking fear into the hearts of the people. Anyone whose blood was sucked by Carmilla turned into a mindless thrall who worshiped her. She had personally brought several countries to ruin that way...' Eek, this is scary."

The young lady hugs me tightly.

"Arwf. *(Ooh, vampire kinks? That's pretty high level.)*"

"Squeak. *(What are you saying? She may not understand you, but your replies are still utterly nonsensical.)*" Len interrupts as she sits on top of Lady Mary's head, reading the book with her.

"Arwf, arwf. *(I would have thought this hero's legend was just a fairy tale. But I see monsters like these all the time.)*"

What was that one called—Lich, the necromancer? I feel bad for him since we ate all his bones, but if we'd left him to his own devices, it would've been bad news for the rest of the world.

"Squeak. *(Well, I'm sure mere humans wouldn't have been strong enough for that. Those pitiable fools should be far more thankful for your rescue.)*"

Please, no. If that happened, my comfy life as a pet would be all over.

"Arwf, arwf. *(But why would they be showing up now? Didn't this legend happen a thousand years ago? Len, do you remember anything from back then?)*"

"Squeak, squeak. *(Hmm. A thousand years ago, I was still a newborn dragon. In general, I never left that cave in the waterfall.)*"

So she's a natural shut-in? From birth?

"Squeak, squeak... *(My father or mother may know something, but I haven't seen them since they left me in my*

infancy. The only ones I had to talk to were the odd mouse or bat that would take up shelter in the cave...) "

This is painful just to listen to. Maybe when Len chose to transform into a mouse, it was because that was the only thing she could think of when using the technique, where mental image was important.

Brrr. I feel so bad for calling her a friendless, thousand-year-old spinster shut-in that I think I'm gonna cry.

"Squeak! (You're thinking something rude again!)"

"Woof, woof. (I was not. I was just pitying you. With everything I had.)"

"Squeak! (I have done nothing deserving of pity! If you would pity me, I would rather you mate with me instead!)"

I'll have to decline.

The young lady yawns. "I'm too sleepy now. Let's continue tomorrow."

"Woof, woof. (It's not good to stay up late. Let's hit the hay!)"

"Squeak. (It is time for children to sleep. Have a good rest.)"

The mineral lamp's gentle light fades, and until the young lady falls asleep, I play the part of a hug pillow.



And then, when all is quiet in the mansion, we slip outside.

It was so hot this afternoon, but now that it's night, the air is chilly. Maybe it's because of all the nature, and how we are close to mountains.

Which means the night is *our* time.

*"Awooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!
(Nngghooooohhhh!! It feels so good to hooooowwwwwwl!!)"*

"Meooooowl! (It doesn't feel particularly good, but I'm copying Routa!)"

"Squeak... (A dragon does not recklessly howl. 'Twould be immodest...)"

Whenever there's a full moon, I just gotta howl.

We are at the pointed edge of this forest, and in a line, we howl under the moonlit sky.

"Arwf... (Ahh, I feel better.)"

I feel like I got it all out. Aaand here comes the postcoital clarity, right on schedule... Anyway, I get to thinking—if I'm a dog, why am I acting like a wolf?

"Woof, arwf. (The moon tonight looks especially delicious. Being not quite full makes it look like an omelet.)"

Actually, an omelet over rice would be better. Ever since the rice we got from Toa made it onto the menu, my passionate lust for rice has been unstoppable.

I need rice. I need chicken over rice, covered with fluffy, melty egg. That out-of-this-world juiciness.

"Ah, my king—so this is where you were."

I turn around at a female voice calling out to me and see Garo, still in human form.

"Woof! (Oh, it's Garo! And everyone else!)"

I look more closely and see that the young Fen Wolves I was in boot camp with are here, too. I give them a friendly "Heya," but they prostrate themselves before me. That makes me feel lonely.

"Arwf. (Come to think of it, Garo, you've been in that human form ever since shape-shifting that one time, huh?)"

"...Not only did four legs not draw your interest, but you hardly seemed convinced that I was a female at all, so I thought I should look like a human, at the very least..."

Garo trailed off, but my Fenrir ears picked it all up perfectly.

I asked Garo once if she was female, and it seemed to wound her pride quite a bit. She got her revenge after that, too, by making me fight a huge boar.

"...Am I a bother to you in this form?"

"A-arwf? (No, not at all, why?)"

I avert my eyes as Garo comes up to cuddle close to me.

To be honest, she's total eye candy. Black hair, golden eyes, and deep brown skin. Slender arms and legs and a tight, firm body. She exudes an exotic charm. Her clothing choice is bold as well. She has the important bits covered with a thin cloth, but she's basically naked. In more than one way, I'm not sure where to look.

"Grwf, grwf! *(This will work! It will work, Lady Garo! Your form is certainly bringing His Majesty into rut!)* "

Don't use terms like that, please.

"Squeak! *(What? Cease being lovestruck and look at me as well!)* "

Len leaps into the air and transforms from a mouse into a person.

"Look, you are going into rut now, are you not? You want to make children with me now, yes?"

Her kimono sliding down one shoulder, Len shoots me a flirtatious glance. I look her straight in the eye.

"Woof, woof. *(Thanks a ton, Len. You really calmed me down there.)* "

"But... But why?! I do not understand!"

"Mrow? *(Huh? Does this mean I have to transform, too?)* "

Please don't.

Please, put yourself in my shoes—the one who has to look at that terribly grotesque scene every time you shape-shift. I finally calmed down. You're gonna give me heart palpitations for a completely different reason from Garo.

Anyway, why did Garo and the others come here, I wonder? It seems like we just ran into each other out of coincidence, rather than them having any real business with me.

"Arwf. *(Oh, oops. Did my howling call you here?)* "

I hadn't meant to. Now I feel bad.

"No, that isn't it. We would run to you faster than the wind itself should you call for us, but we actually had

business at this location tonight as well..."

"Arwf? (*You did?*) "

"Yes. Tonight we welcome a new member of the Fen Wolf family."

Did somebody have a baby? None of the wolves here appear to have rounded bellies.

As I watch blankly, Garo explains for me.

"Do you recall how I explained that monsters come not from a mother's womb, but are instead born from the gathering of mana?"

"Arwf, arwf. (*Yeah, I remember all that.*) "

That's how those violent monsters I occasionally destroy with my beam in the Labyrinth come into existence, if I recall.

"We Fen Wolves are no exception. Unlike monsters who are constrained by their flesh, we are progeny of the moon, closer to spirits. As such, when the full moon draws near and night comes, we are born of the moon, as though falling from it."

The moon gives birth to them? That's a pretty fantastical birthing method. Guess I shouldn't be so surprised at this point. This place is pretty much a fantasy world already.

"Arwf. (*Ha-ha. And tonight is the night someone will be born?*) "

Now I know something else about the Fen Wolves.

What's that? A Fen Wolf king not knowing anything about Fen Wolves? Who would possibly be that dumb? Yes, it's me, I know. I'm sorry. I may have been born Fenrir, but I was raised a pet, so I can't help it.

"We Fen Wolves are broadly divided into twelve clans, and depending on the current month, a different clan will welcome the newly born child. It is the seventh month now, so it is our clan that will do this."

"Arwf. (*Huh. So that's how you get more family members?*) "

I guess this is what makes the strong bonds between Fen Wolves.

"This child will be my first daughter, so I am rather nervous. I hope I'll be a wonderful mother, but..."

"Woof, woof. *(Garo, you'll be fine. I don't think you have anything to worry about.)*"

The gentleness she showed us after that hellish boot camp was overflowing with maternal instinct. Even I almost wanted to call her Mommy.

"Bow. *(Incidentally, the only exception among us Fen Wolves is you, my king.)*"

Covering for Garo, who is flustered at my show of support, Bal continues the explanation.

"Arwf? *(Huh? I'm an exception?)*"

"Grwf, grwf. *(Only female Fen Wolves are born from the moon. There is but one exception: Fenrir, King of the Fen Wolves—you, Your Majesty. Our legends do not state how it is you are born, but the king will always be born male. That, too, proves that you are the King of the Fen.)*"

Well, that's because a goddess reincarnated me into this world. I don't have a clue how the Fen Wolf king's birth is supposed to work, either.

Hold on a minute. If all the Fen Wolves aside from me are female, does that mean Bal—the one who radiates old-man energy—is female, too? *That* would be the biggest surprise.

"Grwf, grwf. *(Lest we allow the king's bloodline to end, we would like you to spread your seed among the Fen Wolves, Your Majesty. However, you are yet young. You may not be comfortable with us telling you to lay paws on whomsoever you see. Thus—go on, Lady Garo.)*"

Urged on by Bal, Garo steps forward.

"W-would y-y-y-you like to try it out with me first?!"

She blushes so hard you can see it in her brown skin as she leans closer to me.

I don't think anything of her when she's in wolf form, but right now, she's a black-haired, brown-skinned beauty. She's

cute, as you would expect, and it troubles me.

Still, the way she's acting coy... Bal must have suggested that one.

"Arwf! (But I refuse!)"

"I... I see..."

Garō's wolf ears flop down. She looks up at me with puppy-dog eyes, but I disregard it.

You'll need cuter moves than that. Breaking my resolve will be impossible if that's all you have. You may have apprehensions about this entire race, but I have apprehensions, too.

About the continuation of my blissful pet life! A pet going out and having babies without its owner knowing could, in the worst case, end with me being neutered.

With my pride and responsibilities as a pet, I've decided to never have any dependents. After all, I, myself, am dependent on others. It would be weird for a pet to be supporting a family.

I'm the kind of guy who doesn't bite off more than he can chew. I'm so cool.

"Mrow! (Routa, you're making a face like you're thinking about something pathetic again!)"

Shut up. Stop reading my mind.

"That... That was close... Curse you, princess of the Fen Wolves... Ever since you learned the art of shape-shifting, you've been appearing out of nowhere. I must be more attentive in the future..."

Len is lost in thought, biting on her thumbnail. You know, I doubt you have any chance of winning unless you do something about your current loli form.

"Grwf. (It seems we must leave it at that.)" Bal speaks while looking up at the sky.

"Arwf. (Oh? The moon is brighter.)"

The moon is rippling as if with a pulse. Eventually that glow gathers underneath the moon, then drips off it like a water droplet.

Slowly it falls toward us.

The thoughts of a modern man flash across my mind, involving things like the physical distance to the moon, but as I watch the moon droplet descend, I figure, what's the point? Magical phenomena happen around me all the time anyway.

The droplet falls slowly, wreathed in light, until it comes to rest in Garo's arms at her breast.

Eventually the pulsating light dies down, revealing a small baby wolf.

No, two wolves. One is white and one is black, each curling inward like yin and yang.

"Mrow! (*They're... They're so cute!*) "

"They are adorable indeed. I, too, would like children soon..."

Nahura and Len peer at the baby wolves from either side of me.

They really are cute. I'll have to make sure never to let the young lady meet them. They'll steal her from me.

"The look on your face says that you're having pointless thoughts again."

"Mew. (*Yep, no doubt about it.*) "

Why does everyone always know what I'm thinking? Is my face *that* easy to read?

"Yes."

"Meow. (*Yep.*) "

"Woof! (*Knock it off!*) "

The two wolves, perhaps having woken up because of our conversation or because of Garo's body's warmth, begin to make little cries.

"Grwf, grwf! (*Twins—a rare sight indeed! White as the moon and black as night, just as His Majesty and Lady Garo are... It is almost as though they have been born to the two of you!*) "

"B-Bal, that's disrespectful!" says Garo, though her tail is wagging like crazy. "...My king, this may be forward of me,

but may I ask a favor of you?" she says to me, the small baby wolves who still haven't opened their eyes cradled in her arms.

"Arwf? *(You never ask favors of me. I'm always the one relying on you, so of course. Allow me to repay you once in a while.)* "

Just not by making babies.

"Would you give names to these children?"

"Arwf. *(Oh, that was what you wanted?)* "

She asked me with such a serious face that I wondered if there was a problem. If it's just a christening, I don't mind at all.

"Arwf... *(Names, huh...? Hmm...)* "

All right, leave it to me. I already had the perfect names in mind for them.

"Arwf, arwf. *(The white one is Shiro, and the black one is Kuro.)* "

"Mrow?! *(That's so basic!)* " Nahura falls over.

What are you saying? In terms of dog names, both of these have an extremely respectable history.

"K-King Routa...!"

Garo practically jumps up to me, bringing her face close.

"A-arw?! *(Wh-what?!)* "

I guess it wasn't okay after all. Were they too plain?

"Thank you very much for the wonderful names! And to think you would take a syllable from my own name as well for them... I'm truly moved!"

I, uh, wasn't thinking about it that deeply. But seeing Garo tearing up with joy, I don't have the heart to tell her how I decided on those names.

"I will remember this blessing for as long as I live! I promise you I will raise these children into excellent Fen Wolves to serve you!"

R-right. Just don't go overboard. Save the boot camp for when they're grown.

"Let us depart for the night, then. I'd like to let these children rest."

"Arwf, arwf. *(Sure, see you. And let me visit them once in a while, too.)* "

I watch as Garo and the others bow deeply and leave.

"Arwf? *(Hm?)* "

Suddenly sensing something odd, I look up into the sky. Nobody's there, though.

It's the middle of the night anyway; the birds aren't even flying. What was that?

"...Arwf. *(...Guess it was just my imagination. We should get home, too.)* "

"Mew! *(Oh, then let's go looking for a late-night snack again!)* "

"Arwf, arwf. *(I like the way you think. Let's get as much as we can without making the old man mad.)* "

"I swear, is eating all the two of you ever think about?"

"Arwf, arwf. *(Then we won't get any for Len.)* "

"I... I didn't say I didn't want any...! Stop trying to make me into a pariah!"



"Oh...? Even in mist form, he was able to sense me. He is neglectful, though. He just shrugged it off."

With an analytical murmur, the mist hanging beneath the moon coalesced and took the shape of a human.

A girl wearing a black dress, the moon floating behind her. With her index finger to her lips, she evaluated those leaving the cliff side.

"He must be the king of the Fen Wolves. It's as if he doesn't know what *caution* is. I could have fired magic at him from this distance if I'd wanted to. Uncle, you lost to *that*?"

“Make no mistake, Miss Carmilla. A short incantation fired abruptly will not and *can* not defeat him,” warned Lich, held in Carmilla’s hand like a sake cup. “And it isn’t only the king. The monsters under his command are all very powerful. When I think back on our battle, I did not have the upper hand for a single moment. Even for one such as you, it would not be a wise idea to engage him in a straightforward fight.”

Lich’s bones shuddered in fear as he remembered being eaten.

“Please, Miss Carmilla, think about this in a calm, concentrated manner. As long as the Demon Lord is sealed in these lands, the King of the Fen Wolves, ruler of the forest, will be an obstacle. We will not need to worry should we turn him to our side; furthermore, it seems he coexists with humans. It is in his mental nature to live in consideration of those frail humans despite possessing such immense power. His essence is *very* far removed from that of monsters. He is much too abnormal. I doubt our words would mean anything to him.”

Carmilla, on the other end of his tedious, repetitive explanation, puckered up her face at the bones.

“I get it already. I’ll keep my guard up. That’s what you want, isn’t it? I lost all *my* own followers when I was sealed, too. We’ll start by observing and gaining a foothold. And also—I’m thirsty.”

Narrowing her bloodred eyes, the vampire princess smiled.



“Routa, I foound you!”

“Arwf, arwf! (*Oh no, you found me!*) ” I crawl out from under the garden fence.

"Routa, you're so big I find you right away!" The young lady brushes off the leaves stuck to me.

"Arwf. *(Can't argue with that.)* "

Our games of hide-and-seek are hardly even games at this point. I'm so big there's nowhere for me to hide, and I can sniff out the sweet-smelling young lady no matter where she is. The rounds end in the blink of an eye.

But that's where my Japanese customer service mentality comes in. Rather than *actually* searching her out, I *pretend* to search.

"Okay, now it's my turn to hide! You have to find me!"

"Arwf, arwf! *(Okay!)* "

I turn around and put my front paws over my eyes. While I do so, the young lady patters off at a trot, looking for somewhere to hide.

"Arwf, arwf? *(Can I look now?)* "

"Not yet!"

"Arwf, arwf? *(Can I look now?)* "

"Hee-hee. Not yetttt!"

"Arwf, arwf? *(Can I look now?)* "

"...You can look now!"

I have consent, so I turn around and start looking for her.

There, behind the fountain! It only took a second to spot her. I didn't even have to sniff her out. She's hiding in a spot that's so easy to see it's almost refreshing. I can glimpse her beautiful platinum-blond hair even from where I am.

In her not seriously trying to hide, her kindness is palpable; this way I have an easy time finding her. But it would be dull to go along with it and find her. All who are pets must let their masters have fun. If I don't feign enough dullness, they might suspect I'm a monster.

"Squeak. *(Normal dogs don't have the intelligence to understand hide-and-seek in the first place.)* "

Y-yeah, probably not. Nobody's ever called me out on it, though, so it's fine.

"Arwf! *(Right, here I come!)* "

The question is how I should go about arriving at the young lady's hiding place.

"Arwf? (*Are you here? Nope!*) "

"...Hee-hee, that's not it! I'm not over there..."

The young lady watches me from behind the fountain as I poke my nose into the bushes and check the backs of trees.

Okay, great—she's having fun, which is all that matters. I'll take as roundabout an approach as I can to wander over near her. And then I'll call out right before she gets concerned that I haven't found her yet. A masterful display of customer service, if I do say so myself.

"Squeak, squeak. (*You actually seem quite skilled at playing with children... You will be a fine father one day. I look forward to the future.*) "

Shaddup. That future is never happening.

I quiet my breathing, then creep up on the young lady before using my front leg to touch her back.

"Arwf! (*Found you, young lady!*) "

"You found me!"

Watching Lady Mary giggle in delight makes me happy, too. This is the only sliver of free time she gets outside of her daily studies. I have to make sure she has as much fun as possible.

Conversely, you could say this is about the only time I actually move during the day. It's just too hot.

"Squeak... (*I cannot believe how cozy you constantly get with each other without ever getting tired of it... What is going on with these prearranged matches? What are you, lovers?*) "

"Arwf? (*Wait, seriously? We look like that? Aw, you're making me blush.*) "

"Squeak! (*Grrr! You are such a pervert! No, your perversion puts perverts to shame!*) "

"Arwf, arwf. (*If that's how you feel, then why not join in yourself? Although she might not be able to find you since you're so small.*) "

"Squeak... (I decline. I'm supposed to be sleeping the daylight away...)"

After saying that, Len buries herself in my mane, and then her breathing grows steady. I have to say, she's even more of a NEET than me—and I'm a pet!

"Arwf... (That's strange, though...)"

For whatever reason, I take a look around.

Ever since yesterday, I've felt someone's eyes on me, appraising my fluffy body. Usually the only ones who give me the borderline stalker stare are Len and Garo, but Len is in my mane and Garo is too busy with child rearing to come this far out.

I survey my surroundings, but I don't see anything that catches my eye.

Actually, there's something suspicious about the roof... I narrow my eyes and stare hard, but nothing seems to pop out at me. Maybe I'm overthinking it. Len hasn't reacted at all, either. Must be just me.

"Is something the matter, Routa?" asks the young lady, tilting her head in mystification.

"Woof, woof! (Nothing at all, young lady! Shall we continue our game of hide-and-seek?)"

I put it from my mind, and we play as much as we can until Toa comes to tell Mary that her break time is over.



"Aruru, Iruru? Eruru still hasn't come back..."

Her two older sisters, who were preparing the bedchambers, turned around at their younger sister's addressing them.

Aruru and Iruru were twins, but Ururu could of course tell them apart, since she was family. Or so they thought, anyway—she actually got them mixed up all the time. Even *they* didn't bother trying to distinguish themselves, so

they'd stopped minding so much if someone got them wrong.

Routa, the King of the Fen Wolves, savior of the elven race, was the only one who had never confused them. Just thinking about it made Aruru's and Iruru's chests warm, and they were unable to hold in their feelings of gratitude.

Ahh, I want to spoil him. I want to spoil him rotten and ruin him.

The older of their younger sisters, Ururu, wondered at times if it was actually a darker desire than gratitude, but it wasn't especially bothering anyone, so she didn't point it out.

More importantly, she was concerned about where the middle of the younger sisters, Eruru, had gone off to.

Contrary to her glasses-wearing, mild-mannered appearance, Eruru was energetic and always up to something outside the village.

Though they were under the protection of the Fen Wolves, who had an information network spanning this entire forest, that didn't mean there were no monsters out there. With night having already fallen, it was strange that she hadn't come home yet.

"Anyway, let's go look for her. Where's Oruru?"

"She's already looking."

"Okay, then we should join her. If anyone here can use lamp magic, have them help us."

"All right!"

The sisters put on their overcoats and left to find the missing Eruru. Even before the slave traders had burned the village, Eruru would go out without telling anyone and suddenly wander back, so they weren't overly worried.

"Heeey! Eruru!"

"Eruru, where are you?"

"Eruru! If you're there, say something!"

The full moon shining in the night sky illuminated everything brilliantly, but not enough to allow them to see

too far in the forest. The two older sisters, who could use simple magic, had hovering orbs of light in place of torches as they searched for their younger sister.

"It looks like Eruru is gone again."

Villagers came running, one after another, once they heard the news.

"Yes. We're sorry to trouble you, but we'd like you to help us look."

"Oh, sure thing. Let's split up to search for her."

It was almost bedtime for the good-natured elves, but all of them came out to search for Eruru without complaint.

"Eruru!"

"Eruruuuu!"

As they continued to search, calling her name through the forest, some bushes in the direction of Aruru's search rustled.

"Eruru!" she called. A figure appeared.

And it was certainly her younger sister, Eruru.

Aruru's sisters gathered to her voice.

"Did you find her?!"

"Phew. You shouldn't worry us like that."

"Sometimes Oruru seems older than you. Don't worry us like that again."

Everyone surrounded Eruru and rejoiced over her safety.

"....."

But Eruru was acting strange—normally she'd quibble and make excuses, but she wasn't doing either. She wasn't even responding, and her face was pale. Aruru took her younger sister's shoulder, thinking she'd been wounded somewhere.

Eruru, lips trembling, managed to speak.

"...Run...away..."

"Run away? What do you mean? From what?" asked Aruru, peering into her face, worried something had happened to her.

"Run away.....from me!"

She grabbed the hand on her shoulder, tightly. The force of it surprised Aruru, and a moment later she'd been bitten in the neck.

"Aruru?!"

"Eruru?! What are you doing?!"

They frantically peeled Eruru off the bitten Aruru.

Eruru's mouth was spattered with blood, and she had sharp fangs that glistened eerily in the moonlight. The elves were taken aback, not sure what had happened. Meanwhile Aruru, who had fallen on her face, got up slowly.

"Wait, Aruru, are you okay?!" Iruru ran over to her in worry, but then her face froze.

Now Aruru, too, had two sharp fangs in her mouth.

"Run...away..."

Aruru and Eruru, shedding tears of blood, attacked the remaining elves.

And so the elf village, which had just been rebuilt, was destroyed in a single night.



"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!! Weak! How weak! How frail the kin are compared to their king!"

The vampire princess laughed, snakelike trails of red blood running across her body.

Garo and the others bared their fangs to threaten the invader who had suddenly attacked their settlement.

Several Fen Wolves had already been defeated at Carmilla's hand. Their enemy had caught them by surprise, and they lacked a means of attack. But they couldn't keep glaring at each other like this. There were young Fen Wolves here as well—ones who didn't have the strength to fight.

"Grwl! (*Don't underestimate us...! You're about to learn firsthand how we fight...!*) "

Garó, leading the pack, dug her claws into the earth and sought an opening to pounce. The enemy was in human form, but it was clear she was anything but. Pure malice radiated from every pore, and Garó could sense a power rivaling that of the necromancer they'd once fought.

"Bow! (*Lady Garó!*) "

Bal ran to her, having brought reinforcements with her.

"Grwl! (*Bal! Take the children and leave this place! Inform the king of this!*) "

Never breaking eye contact with Carmilla, Garó ordered the evacuation of the noncombatants.

"Not so fast. I need you all to disappear *here* ."

With a thin smile on her lips, Carmilla slowly closed the distance.

"But I *will* listen to any preferences on how you want me to kill you."

Sharp red nails then extended from her hands, looking like ten scythes. She brought the nails together, sending sparks scattering madly, portending a terrifying sharpness.

"Grrr! (*That's the last time you ever look down on us!*) "

"Grwl! (*Wait! Don't be reckless!*) "

Garó couldn't stop them in time; the Fen Wolves who had been hiding and waiting for their chance sprang out to attack Carmilla from all sides.

"Not. A. Chance. ♪ "

Carmilla swung the nails on both hands as though dancing. The Fen Wolves twisted to avoid them, but the surge of blood that came a moment later rose up to swallow them.

"Grahhh?!"

The murky, raging stream swirled upward like a tornado, whipping the wolves every which way.

The attackers helplessly sank into the blood, eventually disappearing.

Carmilla exhaled. "Thank you for the snack," she said, the wave of blood pulling back into her mantle as though

being sucked in, leaving Fen Wolves flat on their faces in its wake.

It was hard to tell, given their absolute motionlessness, whether they were alive or dead.

“Tastes terrible, though... Young *human* blood really is the best. Elven blood wasn’t bad, either, but I very much feel like snacking on the blood of a youthful virgin. ♪ ”

“G-grwl...! (*Damn you...! You’ve even gotten to the elves’ village...?!*) ”

Garo was astounded that they hadn’t been able to detect that even with their sharp senses.

If they’d actually noticed this vampire approaching, they’d never have been caught by surprise. She possessed concealment techniques that exceeded the Fen Wolves’ senses.

Her objective was unknown, but this enemy could become a threat to the king. They needed to swiftly pass along the information they’d acquired to him. The dragon princess was with the king as well. Those two would be able to counter this powerful opponent.

She needed to let Bal and the young wolves escape—and Garo was prepared to risk her life to create an opening for them.

“The one past here, yes? I’ve partaken of them. Don’t you think you’ve been a *little* too neglectful of their security? What a tribe of incompetents you are, Fen Wolves.”

Garo’s hair stood up. Her inability to save the elves, whose protection had been entrusted to the king, and her family from being harmed were enough to fill her limbs with mortified rage.

Cracks appeared in the ground on which she stood.

“Grwl! (*You will atone with your life, bastard!*) ”

Garo disappeared.

Even the eyes of Bal, another Fen Wolf, couldn’t track her god-speed assault.

Carmilla, however, caught her fangs easily with her nails.

“Oh, stop... Beasts’ blood doesn’t taste good. But I *am* still thirsty, so I’ll put up with it and drink you dry.”

“Grwl, grwl!! *(Bal, go! I swear I’ll stop her! Don’t turn back! Run as fast as you can!!)* ”

“Grwf, grwf...! *(Lady Garo...! Damn... Leave Shiro and Kuro to me! Please stay safe!)* ”

“I already *said* you weren’t getting away—”

As Carmilla took aim at the fleeing Bal, Garo’s claws sliced at her.

“Grwl. *(I said I’d stop you.)* ”

A line of blood ran down Carmilla’s cheek, and a single drop of it fell.

“...Not bad. Okay. I’ve got something special in store for you.”

Her long tongue reached out to lick the blood on her cheek.

Eyes glittering with anger, Carmilla swung her nails. The blades created vacuums in their wakes. Garo slipped by them, gaining distance for a charge.

She’d successfully diverted the enemy’s attention. Now it was about how long she could stall her.

“Grwl, grrr...! *(Don’t think you’ll kill me for free, you leech. We Fen Wolves can rip out your windpipe even after we die...!)* ”

“Ha! Very funny. Go ahead and try, you lowborn mongrel.”

Carmilla grinned scornfully at Garo, baring all her teeth.

Remembering her king for a moment, and praying for Shiro and Kuro’s safety, Garo threw herself into a battle with her life on the line.

"Arwf? (Okay, what game should we play tonight?) "

Even slipping out of the young lady's bed and going out to play has become part of my daily routine. It does mean I've been sleeping until after the sun comes up, but staying out late is too much fun for me to care.

Why not go hang out at the elves' village? I promised I'd visit them once I lost weight. It's just that if I went to them, they'd spoil me to no end. I already live at the peak of laziness, and they'd try to entice me to fall even further. And that's scary, because I probably would never be able to turn back. The next thing I know, I'd probably find myself worshipped as the guardian deity of their village.

I don't want my life to be chained down to anything, so I'll pass on accumulating faith like that or reigning as a king, thank you. Being kept as a pet is perfect for me, as expected.

"Squeak? (Why not go and visit Shiro and Kuro?) "

"Mew! (They were both so cute!) "

Len's and Nahura's cheeks redden when they recall the little cries the baby wolves were making.

They're right. Maybe it would be nice to go for a visit. I'd hesitate to get in the way of Garo raising them, but a little bit of looking at them shouldn't be a big deal.

"Arwf, arwf. (Actually, I don't know where Garo and the others live.) "

They always show up right away when I call for them, so I've never gone to see them myself. My arrival at the Fen Wolves' training ground was a coincidence, so maybe they have dens nearby?

"Squeak. (The night is young. Why not take a walk in the meantime while we search?) "

"Arwf. (Sure, that works.) "

We walk randomly through the woods, searching for Garo. Well, I'm the only one walking and searching, anyway. Len and Nahura are just riding on my back, relaxing.

"Arwf, arwf? (Gah. I keep saying this, but why don't you two walk by yourselves?) "

"Squeak? (I keep saying this, but why are you dissatisfied with two beautiful women riding on you?) "

"Mew. (Exactly. If this form isn't to your liking, I can change into a human if you want.) "

"Arwf. (Please, no. I'll pass out.) "

No matter how cute the end product is, I don't want to see the horror show that is her transformation. Also, if she changed into a person, she'd be that much heavier. At least stay that small size.

From time to time I stop and sniff around, searching for Garo's scent. I thought I'd find her easily using my sense of smell, but it's not going so well. How come? I can find the young lady's floral scent immediately.

"Squeak. (Hmm. It appears my nose is having trouble as well. It was never as good as yours, but it feels as though a strange haze is covering everything.) "

Len seems to be experiencing the same thing. Although I don't get what she means about the haze and stuff.

Well, it's probably just that I can't tell Garo's scent apart from all the other scents in the forest. I might be picking up on it but lack the talent to discern it.

It's great that my Fenrir body is so awesome, but it's still only me on the inside, so I'm clearly not able to master those skills. Garo and the other Fen Wolves have much better noses and ears, too. Woe is me—does the title of King of the Fen Wolves mean nothing?

Hey, that's good. Real good. Accept that it means nothing. Let's just abandon the rulership of the Fen Wolves. I'd like to be friends with Garo and the others, but I don't want to be their king. Why won't anyone understand my delicate dog's heart?

"Squeak. *(Beloved, your mane seems to be somewhat agitated. Is something the matter?)* "

"Arwf? *(My mane?)* "

I only notice it after Len says something. My neck feels weirdly itchy for some reason, and then I realize the hairs in my mane are standing on end.

"Arwf? *(What's up with that? I'm feeling it from the direction of the mansion.)* "

I turn back the way we came, and the nervous itch intensifies.

"Arwf. *(Well, we can't find Garo, so let's go home for today.)* "

This itchiness is giving me a bad feeling. Is this what they call a premonition?

"Squeak. *(If you say so, I wouldn't mind.)* "

"Mew. *(It's too bad, but we can see them anytime we want.)* "

I turn on my heel and return the way I came.

And then a figure falls over, as if to block my passage.

"Arwf?! *(Whoa?! That scared me!)* "

She came wobbling out of the brush—it's Ururu, her hair loose.

"Arwf, arwf?! *(H-hey, what's wrong?! Are you all right?!)* "

She must have tripped and fallen several times, because her elbows and knees are scraped and she's covered in dirt. We have to get her in the bath and heal her.

"Arwf. (Which way was the village again? Or would the mansion be closer to here? Anyway, get on my back. We'll patch you up at the mansion.) "

Oh, and once we get to the mansion, please don't call me King or anything.

"K-King..."

Yes, *that* . Don't do that.

"Save us, King Routa...!" shouts Ururu in tears, grabbing a clump of my fur with a trembling hand. *"My sisters... Eruru... Oruru... Everyone...! Please, King Routa! Please save them! If there's something I can do... I'll do anything!"*

Now's clearly not the time to say, *"Hmm, did you say 'anything'?"*

Judging from Ururu's wounds, she must have run here in considerable haste. I don't know what happened, but we should probably go save them now. Garo and the other Fen Wolves are in the forest, too. By the time we get there, the others should already have arrived.

"Arwf. (All right. Should we go to the village then?) "

Shaking, Ururu nods and climbs on me. I listen to her directions and run toward the elves' village.

"Woof, woof. (Anyway, Ururu, what happened?) "

"I don't know... Eruru disappeared, and then when we found her, she bit my sisters... And then my sisters started acting weird..."

They got bitten and started acting weird? Kind of sounds like that general of the Demon Lord the young lady taught me about from the book.

"Arwf, arwf. (What was her name? Panna Cotta?) "

"Squeak. (Carmilla—it was Carmilla. Where did you even get that name? It doesn't even sound like it,) " offers Len, exasperated. *"Squeak. (But as you say, infecting others with one's own blood to increase one's followers is a trait of immortal monsters such as vampires and corpse-eaters.) "*

"Arwf, arwf. (Mm-hmm.) "

"Squeak, squeak. (But if this one is able to turn a race with very high magic resistance like elves, they must be a very powerful vampire. The kind spoken of in legends. Your prediction may turn out to be correct.) "

It was less a prediction and more you literally just explaining everything, but whatever.

As I continue to run, I eventually see smoke rising in front of us. However, it's not the kind of thin billowing that comes from cooking—it's black smoke, from things being on fire.

"Woof, woof! (Is everyone safe?!)"

I run to the village, and there I find a hellscape of pandemonium.

Elves, running around with bright-red bloodshot eyes, pouncing on fleeing elves, digging their fangs into their necks. And then those bitten elves attacking other elves in an endless chain.

The elves' village didn't have that many people to begin with, so it probably won't take much time for everyone here to become a vampire.

"Woof, woof! (How do we fix it?! Isn't there any way to turn them back to normal?!)"

"Squeak! (There is!)"

There is?! That's way too convenient. I'm going to start calling you Blue-emon.

"Squeak, squee-squeak. (It would appear as though they've only lost their reason and are raging about. They've only recently been infected. If we destroy the vampire at its source, the spell embedded in their blood will dissolve and they'll eventually return to normal.) "

Then you mean they'll be like this until we do that? If the elves turn and go for the mansion where the young lady and the others live, things will get bad.

"Squeak! (Oh, it's a simple matter to prevent the infection from spreading!)"

"Arwf? (How do we do that?)"

"Squeak! (We knock them all unconscious!)"

Len climbs off me and cancels her tail's mouse-ification.

Her dragon's tail undulates, hard as steel, and with a *crack* it slams into the elves nearby.

Wow. I never knew elves could fly.

The knocked-away elves drop to the ground, eyes rolled back in their heads.

"A-arwf... (*Wh-whoa...*) "

No mercy at all.

"Squeak! (*Mm. Excellence from me yet again! I held back the perfect amount.*) "

This is what you call holding back?

Actually, if Len seriously swung her tail, she could probably smash the entire village to smithereens. In that sense, I guess she certainly did hold back.

I'd never want to be on the receiving end of that, though.

".....!"

And look. Ururu is so shaken she can't even react. She looks like she's dazed. Is she really all right?

"Squeak. (*Good. Let's keep this going!*) "

Len's tail snaps and cracks as it whips about, slithering through the village like a serpent, gently slamming into the necks of the elves and knocking them out. Gently, I say—but gently by Len's standards, it must not be forgotten.

Boy, they're all going to have some crazy whiplash after we take out the root cause and get them back to normal. Forgive us—it's an emergency. A thousand pardons.

Still, Len *is* being very skillful in moving her tail around this cramped village. It's almost like it has a mind of its own as it neck chops the elves.

"Mew. (*Lady Len, you don't look it, but you have a lot of subtlety.*) "

"Squeak? (*What do you mean, I don't look it? I've always been subtle. Wait, have I not?*) "

"Arwf. (*No, you definitely look the part. I mean, you're knocking everyone out, including the elves who haven't turned into vampires yet.*) "

"Mew. (Ahh, yes, it turns out Lady Len is as unsubtle as she looks.) "

"Squeak! (Why do you keep bringing up my looks?!)"

Her accuracy in knocking out the elves is perfect, unparalleled. You could certainly call that subtle. At the same time, though, her mind and body aren't subtle at all, taking everyone down like this. And *that's* what your looks indicate.

"Mew, ew. (Oh! I'll go put out the fires. When I was brought to the snowy mountains recently, I left an anchor there. If I connect this place with that one using spatial magic, I should be able to use cold snow for it.) "

"Arwf. (You can? Sure, go for it.) "

"Squee-squeak! (Neither of you have answered me!)"

Though angered, Len continues disabling the elves one after another while Nahura puts out the fires with snow summoned by spatial magic. Eventually the village falls quiet.

"Arwf. (Phew. That should do it for now.) "

Well, I didn't do anything. I was just watching idly, alongside Ururu, as the village grew quieter and quieter.

"Squeak. (Still, beloved, I believe it somewhat optimistic to assume this elven village is the only one under attack, given we are up against a general of the Demon Lord.) "

The thought had crossed my mind, too. Despite all the craziness happening, there's no sign of Garo and the others showing up.

I have a bad feeling about this.

"Arwf. (Ururu, sorry, but I have to go back to the mansion for now. Will you wait here?) "

".....No, King Routa, I'll go with you. I can't ignore the one who made my sisters into this!"

I didn't expect that response. I've only known her for a short time, but I don't remember Ururu being one who wanted to fell enemies instead of care for her sisters.

To be frank, she probably won't be any help if she comes along, but if she wants to stay together, dissuading her now would be a waste of time. And if we left her here, if the elves-turned-vampires woke up and started moving, Ururu would be in danger.

In which case she'd be better off coming with us. My mind made up, I lower myself in front of Ururu.

"Arwf! (*Grab on tight then! I'll be going fast!*) "

"Okay! Thanks, Lord Routa!"

After confirming everyone's on my back, I set off at a sprint straight toward the mansion.



A short while before Routa arrived home...

The mansion lingered in silence, disconnected from the chaos in the forest. Late at night, even the patrolling maids took to their beds, and nobody would wake up until morning arrived.

And now a white mist crawled through that mansion. It entered through the little gaps in doorways, ever advancing toward its destination.

The mist's goal was the room of a beautiful young girl sleeping in a canopied bed. She was slumbering quietly, but occasionally, as though she was just remembering something, her hands would move, searching for something that should be next to her.

The mist traveled to the bed, and, with a chill clinging to it, stroked Mary's skin.

Rapidly the mist regained human form. It was Carmilla, who had returned to the mansion once again.

"Ahh, such a sweet smell..."

Carmilla, leaning over Mary, brought her face closer to her neck.

“As always, the smell of young maidens is the greatest. I’m *sick* of the blood of those beasts. In fact, I’d very much like to cleanse my palate with this child’s blood.”

Carmilla moved her lips toward Mary’s soft neck.

The whole business gave off an air of lewdness, but what waited a moment later would be a brutal death by bloodsucking. Carmilla wasn’t even half-full yet—and so it took willpower to hold herself back from this meal.

“I’d like to drink you dry right now, but unfortunately, I can’t. You need to be our bait to lure out the King of the Fen Wolves.”

But, deciding to at least get her fill of the aroma, she brought her face close to Mary’s neck once more. And then she made a dubious expression.

“...This scent... I’ve smelled it before...”

Carmilla drew away from Mary and searched her memories.

Considering she’d been sealed away for a millennium, there couldn’t have been that many scents she knew. If there were any that she remembered in this way, it would have been before that.

Unraveling her memories, she eventually arrived at the answer.

“I remember now. It’s the same as the Hero’s scent. Could this girl be of the Hero’s bloodline? If she is, then a pillar of the Demon Lord’s sealing—”

“Stop right there, villain!”

A sword flashed as the voice sounded.

Carmilla turned around, a little irritated that her thoughts had been interrupted.

“You sensed my presence, even when I was turned to mist? *And* got behind me without allowing me to sense *your* presence? You are quite skilled, for a human. A thousand years ago, they would have lauded you as a brave hero.”

The one who had slashed at Carmilla from behind was Zenobia. Her death blow, however, had been blocked by

Carmilla's nails.

"Bastard—you're no human...! What business do you have at this mansion?!"

Zenobia pushed her sword, along with the nails, toward Carmilla. The added weight caused her heels to send cracks through the floor.

"What incredible might you have, to push a vampire like me back with arm strength alone. Are you truly a human? Are you sure you're not some greater variety of ogre?"

"Silence...! Get away from the young lady...!"

Her sword creaked against the nails. Their power was evenly matched, and the sword wasn't able to withstand it.

Zenobia's expression was bloodcurdling; Carmilla wore a thin smile.

But their contest of strength ended before the sword even broke.

"...?! Guh...!"

Zenobia groaned in pain, backing off. When she looked into Carmilla's eyes, they were giving off an eerie glow. She fell to one knee, as though weighed down by something invisible, and eventually her sword fell from her hand.

"You... What did you...do to me...?!"

"Your strength may be your pride, but it looks like your resistance toward magic is average. Don't worry—it's only a little sleeping spell. If I allow any of you to be wounded now, *she* will no longer have value as a hostage. Sleep, then, as you curse your own powerlessness. Of course, you probably won't remember anything by the time you wake up."

Scornfully laughing at Zenobia, who was trembling as she desperately tried to stand, Carmilla picked Mary up in her arms.

"I'll be quite careful with your 'young lady.' If she *does* turn out to be a pillar of the sealing, she could be quite crucial for us."

"Wait...! Let go...of her...!"

Zenobia's outstretched hand grasped only air as Carmilla flew out the mansion window.



I'm almost there.

As fast as I can without letting Ururu fall, I run back to the mansion.

"Arwf? (*Is someone at the gate?*) "

Someone is crouching at the front gate we use to enter the mansion.

When we get closer, we see that it's Zenobia, who has been trying to walk by using her sword as a crutch.

"Arwf, arwf! (*What—Zenobia?! What happened?! I thought you were a morning trainer! What are you doing out here?!*) "

"Is that...you, Routa...? Where have you been...? No, that's not important right now... The young lady, she..."

Zenobia reaches out and grabs my chest with a shaking hand.

"The young lady...has been kidnapped..."

"Arwf?! (*Huh?!!*) "

"I'm pathetic... I wasn't able to do anything... No, that's not what I need to be telling you..."

Her mind must be hazy, because her eyes aren't focused. She continues to speak as though in delirium.

"The enemy looked like a human, but she was clearly a monster... She fled in that direction..."

Her trembling fingertip points into the forest. Toward where the lake is—the one we all just vacationed at.

"...I wish I could be the one to save her, but I don't think...my consciousness will last... I hate myself for only relying on you...when it's convenient for me... But you're the only one...who can do anything right now...! P-please... Save her...!"

Finally Zenobia runs out of strength. She falls against me and loses consciousness.

"Woof... *(Zenobia...)* "

"Squeak. (It's nothing to worry about. She's only sleeping. Likely magic interfering with her mind. I can also sense a spell that will take her memories to keep her quiet. She must have tried to tell you before that happened. She shouldn't have been able to pull through with willpower, but it is quite like this stubborn boar of a woman.) "

Seems like Zenobia hasn't been injured. That's a relief.

She's leaning against me, so I lay her to rest on her back at the gate.

"....."

So the young lady has been kidnapped, has she?

"...Squeak? (What's wrong? Why are you silent, my love?) "

"...Arwf. (Heh. Heh-heh... I haven't been this pissed off in a long time...)" "

Time to go up to the roof...

...is how I have to joke to even keep my cool, I'm so mad.

They have some nerve, stealing the young lady from me. I'll show you just how loyal this dog really is.

"Woof! (Great. Let's get moving, you jerks! I don't give a rat's ass about what the Demon Lord's army is after! We're saving Lady Mary and getting back to our old lives!)" "

"Mew. (I think the way you don't get shaken is wonderful!)" "

"Lord Rوتا...!"

I don't have a happy pet life without the young lady. I swear I'll save her.

I mean, we've got Len, a muscle-head dragon who uses sheer firepower for everything, and Nahura, who has a whole assortment of convenient spells. If it comes down to it, they'll take her down for me.

I'm relying on all of you.

I've never forgotten my virtue of relying on others. I'm so cool.

"Squeak. *(Just when I've thought you'd regained your wild spirit through training with the Fen Wolf princess, it's as though you haven't changed at all.)* "

"Mew. *(Well, that's another one of Routa's good qualities.)* "

And with that, they both jump onto my back.

"Arwf, arwf. *(What about you, Ururu? It looks like the enemy boss is waiting for us up ahead. It might be safer for you to stay here. After all, it doesn't seem like she's harmed anyone in the mansion.)* "

"No, I'll go with you!"

I see. Then I've nothing more to say.

There's only one thing to do: destroy anyone who would get in the way of my life as a pet.

"Awooooo!! *(We ride!!)* "

With everyone on board, I start running in the direction Zenobia pointed.



"Squeak. *(In any event, what could they be after?)* "

On top of my head, Len, drawn up to her full height and with her front legs folded, is lost in thought.

"Squeak, squeak. *(We defeated the necromancer Lich once. He opposed us, seeking Mare, who he claimed was created specifically for the Demon Lord. We fought him then, because we had just cause in protecting Mare...)* "

If all that stuff with Mare hadn't happened, we wouldn't have had a reason to fight him. I'm just a pet, after all.

But if we'd let him be, we wouldn't have even known Lich's graveyard was in the forest at all. He might have accumulated power and advanced on the human world before long. Maybe it was a good thing we prevented that in

advance. Even though I feel like that's the sort of job the strong adventurers from the Guild should be taking on.

"Squeak. *(Hmm. I know what it is. Now that we've defeated one of their generals, the Demon Lord's army sees us as enemies.)* "

"A-arwf?! *(Wait, what?! I don't feel the same about them, not one bit!)* "

"Squeak, squeak-squeak-squeak! *(Even the Demon Lord's army, said to have once plunged the world into fear, is avoiding fighting milord face-to-face... Plotting to take hostages is proof enough of that. Heh. Heh-heh. They rate you extremely highly, as I would hope when it comes to you! And as your wife, I am proud as well!)* "

Quit celebrating! Nothing about this should delight you!

If you want to fight over the fate of the world, do it somewhere else. Why does *everything* keep happening in this forest?

And besides, what happened to the Hero?! Hey, Hero! The Demon Lord's army is out and about, so you should be, too! Where are you, Hero?!

Be quick about it! Don't blame me if you're too late!

"Squeak, squeak. *(I doubt it's a coincidence they chose that girl as their hostage. They know full well her relationship with you. Not harming anyone else from the mansion must be a show of intent—they want to appear as though they are open to negotiation. Likely either they want you to trade your life for hers, or they want to recruit you into the Demon Lord's army.)* "

Ugh. So they're the type to do things in a roundabout way.

Maybe that gaze I constantly felt, and the fact that I can't smell, are because of this Carmilla person's magic.

"Squeak. *(This is, however, an excellent opportunity, beloved. That boar girl has thrown her plans into disarray. She must think we do not know where her main base is. I'm sure she's lounging there now, considering the conditions*

for her negotiation. If we act quickly, we should be able to take her by surprise and go on the offensive.) "

"How naive. I knew *exactly* what you'd be planning to do."

I hear the voice denying Len's idea coming from right next to us.

At the same time, a black figure leaps at us.

"Arwf?! (*What?!*) "

Hastily I jump back, then look to see who the figure is.

"Arwf?! (*What—it's you all...?!*) "

It's an entire group of Fen Wolves.

Also, for some reason the bear we fought during boot camp is here, too. Redarmor, was it?

"This *is* somewhat earlier than I'd planned, but I've been prepared for this from the beginning. You may come by anytime."

Floating above the Fen Wolves, in the air, is a beautiful girl in a black dress. Her brow is furrowed as she laughs and bites her finger provocatively.

"That is, only if you can get this far. I've made all your kin my own. A reward for their harming my skin. I will keep them as servants, as pets, until their lives run out."

Sanity is gone from the Fen Wolves' bloodshot eyes. Their fangs seem to have grown even sharper and longer. It's clear Carmilla is manipulating them.

"If you want, I'll keep you as a pet, too. I'll use you as my chair. It's a *very* important job. My. Little. Puppy. Dog! ♪"

"Arwf?! (*What?!*) "

"Hee-hee. I'm sorry, did I make you mad?"

"Arwf! (*Thank you, so much, for that attractive proposition!*) "

Being a beautiful girl's chair? What the hell? That's a reward!

"Arwf, arwf! (*But my heart is set on the young lady, so I refuse! Also, thank you for calling me a dog!*) "

I knew it! I really *am* a dog! That whole thing about being the Fen Wolf King, Fenrir, was a lie! Sweet!

“That’s... Ugh, you’re throwing me off my game. As I thought, the way you think is *far* different from us monsters. It’s so *incredibly* odd, I can’t even have a conversation with you.”

“Mrow. (*Yeah, I think Routa’s weird no matter who looks at him.*) ”

Stop it, Nahura. Quit making me out to be a lunatic.

Monsters, with their minds always set on fighting, are the strange ones. I am a lover of peace—that’s way saner, no matter how you slice it.

“Well, of *course* monsters are keen to fight.” Carmilla sniffs as if to scorn me. She spreads her hands, and the corners of her lips turn up, revealing a row of sharp teeth. “Monsters are that which disgraces man, tramples him underfoot, and abuses him. That is their nature. The very reason for their existence. I’m sure your *companions* understand this quite well. Why not abandon that strange King of the Fen Wolves—a monster by name, if not by choice—and join the Demon Lord’s army? If you do so now, we will treat you *very* well.”

“Squeak. (*Actually, I am not a monster, but rather a dragon.*) ”

“Mew. (*And this humble cat is a homunculus.*) ”

And I’m not Fenrir. I’m a dog.

“I... I see. You’re *all* throwing me off.”

In the first place, these two are practically domesticated now, with how much they’ve eaten the old man’s food. They’d never attack people at this point. If human civilization disappeared, they’d never be able to eat his delicious food again.

“I understand now that we will never see eye to eye. If you insist on saving humans despite being a monster, then come to me—over the corpses of your own comrades.”

At Carmilla's signal, the Fen Wolves' circle begins to slowly edge inward.

The main bad guy is right there, so if we can take her down here, will everyone go back to normal?

"Squeak. *(Beloved, that is an illusion. There would be no point fighting it.)*"

"Arwf. *(Oh, like I thought, then? I figured as much. That's the kind of thing they do in these situations.)*"

"Mew. *(Quite frankly, I think your lack of tension is amazing.)*"

Carmilla's illusion vanishes into the dark, and the manipulated Fen Wolves—and the bear—attack me.

"Grwl...! *(My king... I'm terribly sorry...!)*"

"Grrrr...! *(Please, kill us before we can turn our fangs upon you...!)*"

"Grwl, grwl...! *(If it is you who judges us, my king, we will be satisfied...!)*"

The Fen Wolves painfully plead with me, as though their minds still remain.

Damn it. I could never harm a friend! If I had to, I'd rather choose to let them bite me without resisting!

"Gohh, gohh! *(I don't get it, but I feel intense power swelling within me! Gu-ha-ha-ha! Has the time come to overthrow those above me?! Hey, you, King! Die! I'll show you a technique I learned in hell: my Rotating Batto—brghbhr?!)*"

This violent dragon, on the other hand...

Her undulating tail strikes down Redarmor first, then the other Fen Wolves. I think he was just about to use his ultimate attack, too. How cruel.

"Squeak! *(Run through them, beloved! I shall sweep the small fry away!)*"

Len slams her dragon-ized tail about.

Sorry to bother you while you're so enthusiastic, but make sure to go easy on them, okay?

"G-gohh... (I... I thought I was the strongest... Every last one of you is too insanely strong...)"

Redarmor hangs his head, having lost his energy.

Don't worry, Redarmor. For someone just recently born a monster, I think you're plenty strong. Not that I'd know.

"Grwl... (Urgh...)"

"Grwl... (Your Majesty...)"

"Grwl, grwl... (I thought I would finally be able to feel the sweet sting of His Majesty striking me...)"

Hey...one of you just said something weird.

But if she can joke like that, they should be fine. I'll come back to save you later, so please forgive me.

"Arrrrrwwf! (Out of the way, out of the way! Stand too close and you'll be knocked away! By Len!)"

I focus on running, and as the pursuers come one after another, Len strikes them away with her tail.

It's not only Fen Wolves, either. All kinds of other monsters from the forest are mixed in, too.

She gained this much power in just a few days? If we leave this Carmilla person to her own devices, things could get real bad. Talk about a double-or-nothing game.

I couldn't care less about the fate of the world or whatever, but the punishment for manipulating my forest friends and the young lady will be grave, Carmilla.

I'll beat you down, soak that impertinent face of yours in your tears, and lick them all up as hard as I possibly can!

I howl loudly toward the full moon as I blast toward the lake where Carmilla waits.



Carmilla's plan was progressing smoothly. The schedule had been changed, what with that swordswoman giving the King of the Fen Wolves information, but if he was heading this way, the plan had essentially succeeded.

“Hee-hee. Yes, do fight your own kin as much as you need, eroding both your body and heart before coming here,” she said with a smile, showing a row of teeth as she listened to the cries of monsters reaching her from far off in the forest.

This crystal palace in which she sat was a prison she had made into an impenetrable fortress—a prison that let nobody caught in it escape. It rebuffed external attacks, and she would suck the blood and mana from any who entered.

Carmilla’s crystal palace was different from the graveyard that Lich, another one of the generals, possessed. Geared for invasions, the graveyard allowed him to speed up production of undead soldiers to dispatch. This, however, was a domain ill suited for striking the first blow.

“But with this girl here, the Fen Wolf King will have no choice but to jump into my trap on purpose.”

She checked on the girl, who was sunk in the shadow of her mantle. She seemed to be sleeping deeply, oblivious to what was happening.

“You’re quite the carefree one. Even though your pet dog is risking his life to come save you.”

If this girl was of the Hero’s bloodline, it was possible she was linked to the Demon Lord’s seal. Should Carmilla kill her without thinking, it might not undo the seal—in fact, it might make it even stronger.

Once she put down the Fen Wolf King, she would have to investigate what had happened in the last millennium. After all, the Demon Lord’s wish to destroy the world and turn it into a crucible of chaos had not yet been fulfilled.

“Miss Carmilla, please focus on the enemy in front of you first. You must not—”

“—falter, right. I get it. You’re such a worrywart, Uncle,” said Carmilla, cutting off Lich’s scolding—he was hung up now, like a decoration—with an index finger. “This roundabout plan was for your sake, you know. If I suck out all the Fen Wolf King’s mana using this palace and give it to

you, you'll get your former strength back immediately, won't you?"

"Yes, and I am grateful for this. I will be greatly indebted to you."

"Well, as long as you understand." Carmilla opened the big door connecting the throne room to the balcony. "Come to me, King of the Fen Wolves. I'll drain you dry until you're nothing but a withered husk."



What we see upon arriving at the lake is a giant, crystalline castle.

The thing is so big it takes up the entire surface of the lake. All that's left of it is a moat. A drawbridge leads to the front gate, so we decide to head into the castle from there.

As we approach along the shoreline, the castle's form steadily grows clearer. A fortress of glittering crystal, bathed in moonlight. It's beautiful, while at the same time giving off an ominous air.

"Arwf? (*Hm? The shape of the top—I feel like I've seen it somewhere before...*) "

As I narrow my eyes and stare hard at it, I remember where I saw it.

"Arwf?! (*Isn't that the crystal that was at the bottom of the lake?!*) "

That shape is the very same as that of the crystal I saw when we caught that huge fish. The crystal must have been a part of this castle. Would that mean it rose up from the lake bed?

How dare she build something like that in a place made for rest and relaxation? Now we can't even have fun swimming.

"Oh? You're finally here."

Carmilla, standing on a castle balcony, notices us.

“How does it feel to make it here after trampling over the corpses of your friends? I’m sure you’re quite wounded now, having tried to go easy on them.”

Nope, not at all. After all, Len took them all down at once. All I did was run here. I don’t feel any particular guilt over defeating them, either.

“Woof, woof! *(Len did everything! I’ve been a good puppy!)* ”

“S-squeak. *(N-now, don’t put it like that. You make it sound like it was my fault...)* ”

Len’s so shy for a meathead—and *now* , after all the butt she’s kicked, she starts to get flustered.

“Squeak. *(But as his wife, I do not find it appalling to sully myself for my husband’s sake. Because I’m his wife. Because I’m his wife!)* ”

It’s not that big a deal. No need to say it twice.

The mouse calling herself my wife squirms around in embarrassment, which I ignore.

“Arwf. *(Anyway, that castle is freaking huge.)* ”

Actually, no matter how you look at it, this castle is something Carmilla summoned, right? She’s right there living in it.

Then what was that story passed down about this lake all about, with the crystal that kept monsters away with its holy powers?

It’s not a holy crystal at all—it’s literally a base for monsters. That’s an extreme case of telephone through the ages. Maybe it’s not strange for that to happen over the span of a thousand years, but this means even the legend of the Hero is suspect.

But right now, those questions aren’t as important as rescuing Lady Mary.

“Woof, woof! *(Carmilla! I came, like you asked! Where’s the young lady?!)* ”

“Hee-hee. She’s right here.”

The young lady, unconscious, appears from within the mantle Carmilla wears. She's still in her sleepwear, her eyes are closed, and she's breathing softly in slumber.

"Woof! *(Hey, what did you do to her?! She's unconscious!)* "

"Actually, I haven't done *anything* yet... She's been sleeping ever since before I made off with her... Despite all the noise, she just doesn't want to wake up... Soundest sleeper I've ever seen..."

As expected of the young lady. Once she falls asleep, it's very hard to wake her up. I'm glad she can sleep through something like this.

After all, if anyone found out I was fighting the Demon Lord's army, wouldn't that be the end of my life as a pet? My gut tells me the young lady would be able to accept that, but I must cut off any anxieties regarding my future. I'm just an adorable white puppy dog who happens to be a little bit big.

"Squeak. *(How long do you intend on making such untenable claims?)* "

Until I die. Duh. Don't think some superficial resolve will ever break my faith that I live as a pet dog.

"Mew. *(The more you try to make it sound amazing, the more uncool it gets.)* "

Oh, zip it.

But our current situation is an actual crisis. Carmilla may be acting easygoing, but that doesn't mean she won't harm the young lady.

"Woof, woof. *(Anyway, what do I have to do to get you to return her? If you want me to crawl on my belly and lick your shoes, I would gladly do that.)* "

Also, you can throw in the extra condition of using me as your chair.

"...No thank you."

Her face looks really peeved now. Her disparaging glare is pretty good, actually. It gets a gold star from me.

“...Well. It certainly seems too dangerous to allow anomalous monsters like *you* into the Demon Lord’s army. It would be simple to tell you to kill yourselves, but where’s the fun in that?”

Carmilla rests her elbows on the balcony railing, and the crystalline castle opens its gates.

“If you can make it all the way to my room, you can have her back.”

She then leaves the balcony, bringing the young lady inside the castle. As she shuts the windows, she beckons.

“Arwf. (Okay. You promised.) ”

I cross the bridge made of crystal and head through the gate.

From the outside, looking in from the gate, the clear crystal castle is filled with muddled black shadows.

“Squeak. (Beloved, I know I don’t need to tell you this, but you’re walking into a trap.) ”

“Mew. (Ururu is here, too. Maybe we should withdraw.) ”

“Squeak, squeak. (I don’t know the details of the magic cast on this castle, but it probably springs from her vampiric characteristics. It will be a dangerous labyrinth, where your entrance will trigger the draining of your magic or blood, and you’ll likely be toyed with and killed. If you go inside, it’s over. You will not leave until you are a withered husk.) ”

“Lord Rوتا...”

They all look at me uneasily.

“Arwf? (Huh? Who said we’re going inside?) ” I respond blankly.

Carmilla told us to get all the way to her room. She didn’t say to go through the inside.

I look up at the castle and gauge the position. About there? Maybe a little over?

“Hee-hee-hee. Are you trying to scale the walls? What a foolish idea.”

From past the front gate, we hear Carmilla’s voice, which sounds as though she’s seen through my plan.

“It won’t work. Not in a thousand years. Do you think you’re the first one to have that idea? I’ve spent many long years pouring blood and mana into this palace—this magical base built up from a single crystal. You could even call it a different world of sorts. One where physical laws don’t necessarily apply.”

Carmilla proudly introduces us to her castle. She must be really confident in its defenses.

She cackles, scorning my idea. “Any attacks from the outside would be pointless—this castle is famously the strongest, most impenetrable fortress in the Demon Lord’s army. Whether a thousand thunderbolts strike it or it’s rained upon by countless asteroids, nothing will ever damage it. So abandon hope and enter the normal way. Oh, and of course, it’s just as the dragon says. Inside the palace is an execution ground that will bleed you dry. I’ll melt you all slowly, tantalizing you. But do you think you should be taking up so much time over there? If you make me wait *too* long, I will grow thirsty, and I might drink every last drop of this girl’s—”

“Grrrowwwwwwl!! (*This is taking too long!!*) ”

As if to devour Carmilla’s words, I fire a beam.

The flash of light paints the night white. The white pillar of light extends diagonally upward, strikes the crystal castle directly, and bores a hole right through the wall without any resistance whatsoever.

The glowing line shoots through the castle and puts a hole in the mountain far behind it, too.

“Wh... *Whaaaaaaaat?!* ”

We hear Carmilla’s astonished voice from beyond the hole.

“Arwf? (*What was that about being the toughest in the Demon Lord’s army?*) ”

Hey, how does it feel? Punching a hole in your vaunted castle was really easy. How does it feel?

How does it feel, how does it feel?!

I stamp my hind legs to provoke her.

"That's... This isn't...! My greatest magic... In just one attack...?!"

The spell must have dissipated after the wall broke; the shadows filling the castle's interior begin to weaken.

"Could that have been ultimate destruction magic...? Not only completely draining one's mana, but taking a long time to activate, that utterly impractical, ineffective, useless spell... And you used it with that much speed and precision...? And you're telling *me* you can do all this by refining so much mana in an instant?! How do you explain that?! What *are* you?!"

Beyond the gaping hole, I can see Carmilla, stomping her foot in frustration. The wall right next to her has been neatly removed, and the full moon is visible behind it.

"Arwf! (*Great! There you are! Here I come!*) "

I jump up to the hole I made and run into Carmilla's room, all in one burst.

"Woof, woof! (*See, look at that! I kept my promise! Now you're gonna return the young lady to me!*) "

"What... What a reckless plan of attack...! The crystallization of mana I've spent so many long years building...lost to a spell cast on the spot... That's insane! Impossible!"

I mean, it seems possible to me. Why fight it at this point?

"Woof, woof! (*You promised you'd give her back if I got all the way to your room! What, can you great generals not even keep a single promise?*) "

Yikes. The only ones allowed to break promises are the grunt bad guys.

"Be quiet! This isn't over! My thralls, the time is now! Do it!"

Her thralls? Where are they? The only one near Carmilla is the young lady. I don't see any of her thralls anywhere—

"Squeak! (*Beloved!*) "

The moment I hear Len's warning...sharp fangs thrust into my neck.

"Mew?! (*Ururu?!*)" Nahura cries out.

Ururu? Yes, it's her. She's biting me so hard I can hear her jaw creaking.

The scarlet light in her eyes... She's clearly gone mad. Just like the Fen Wolves who were bitten and made into Carmilla's kin.

Wait, then when was Ururu bitten? We've been together ever since meeting in the forest. There shouldn't have been time for that.

"She was obviously like that from the start! I was aiming for the moment you let your guard down when I sent you that girl. That was how I stopped you from going back to the mansion and made you go to the elves' village instead. It was to buy time to steal your master! Didn't you think it was *strange* how I knew your every move?"

Certain of her victory, Carmilla gives a piercing laugh.

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! You might be strong, but a beast is still a beast! And now you'll be my kin! I'll make good use out of you as a laborer! Forever!"

"Arwf? (*Huh? Hard labor? I don't want to work. I'll have to refuse.*) "

"Yes, I know, it's an offer you can't refu—Wait, what? You refuse?"

"Arwf. (*Yep, I refuse.*) "

I wouldn't mind her using me as a chair or getting to lick her, but my rule is to always refuse to do any work.

My oath never to work is the one thing nobody can ever break.

"Wh... What is the meaning of this?! Once you're my thrall, you should be under my direct command, even if your mind remains!"

"Arwf, arwf. (*Well, that's because I'm not your thrall.*) "

I give her the obvious answer.

You make people your thralls by biting them and sucking their blood. But none of my blood has been sucked. So, obviously, I wouldn't turn.

"Uuurrr...?!"

Ururu is doing her best to bite into me, but my fur is blocking it; she hasn't even pierced me by a single millimeter. It actually feels good, like she's giving me little love bites.

"Squeak. *(How foolish. His fur boasts such high defense that even a dragon such as I could bite into his fur with the might to shatter his bones and only make him feel a pinch.)*"

Wait, you've been biting me with your full strength this whole time?! That's terrifying. Your jealousy is going to be the death of me!

"Squeak, squeak. *(Naturally, an elf's meager jaws would never pierce him, regardless of how much control you have over her body.)*"

Len gives Ururu a smack in the neck.

"As for you. Do not press your lips to my beloved's neck so. That is the sole right of his wife."

She immediately changes into a human and catches Ururu as she slides off me. Of course, with the difference in body sizes, she looks like she's hefting a big object rather than carrying someone.

"No... Not yet...!"

It seems Carmilla still hasn't given up. She calls the young lady out from the shadow of her mantle, then puts her nails up against her neck.

"Did you forget the hostage is still in my hands? If this is jogging your memory, would you mind getting out of my palace?"

First she wants me to come in, and now she wants me to get out. I wish she'd make up her mind.

However, probably because of the holes I created, cracks are rapidly spreading through the palace walls. Crystal

fragments start falling like raindrops, too. It doesn't take a genius to realize I should probably get the heck out of here.

"Miss Carmilla, what do you intend on doing?!"

"Regrouping. As long as we have the girl, he can't try anything."

Ngh. She's right. That is a problem.

More importantly, this blondie vampire is talking to a skull. It always struck me as a decoration in poor taste. Is he one of Carmilla's?

Actually, that skull...isn't that Lich? He's so tiny now, but there's no denying the voice.

He should be safely stored in our stomachs right now, but he must have survived.

Wait, does this mean we get a free replay?

As I slurp my drool back up, the skull yelps a little and starts to shiver.

Carmilla puts Lich in her pocket and glares at us.

"Squeak? *(What will we do, beloved? Risk it all and everyone jump her at once?)* "

"Arwf. *(No. If we had the element of surprise, maybe, but we can't go right at her like this. Oh, Nahura, what about your teleportation? Hecate did that before, right? When she took back that elf the slaver captured.)* "

"Mrow. *(With my humble control over magic, I don't think I can transport myself between two people so close together. And I can't activate it instantly like my mistress can.)* "

Hmm. So, it's not that Nahura is bad, but that Hecate is too good. It would have been a big help if she were here, but there's no use crying for the moon.

"Arwf... *(What shall we do? Ah, wait...)* "

I notice something behind Carmilla. It's the big hole in the wall. And visible through it, black ears poking out.

This might be our chance.

"What is your choice? If you dally, I'll kill her."

"W-woof, woof! *(A-all right, all right! We'll leave. Just don't do anything to her!)* "

Still facing Carmilla, we back off, little by little.

"Get *out* of here already!"

"Arwf! *(We are! Don't rush us!)* "

Once we've backed off to the hole behind us, I select a few words that will draw Carmilla's attention.

"Arwf, arwf. *(By the way, Miss Carmilla, we're both out of options here, so why not just put everything back to normal and call it even? We'll stay out of poking our noses in places we don't have any business being.)* "

"What?! You must be joking! Look how badly you've destroyed my crystal palace! You aren't getting off for free! I *will* have my revenge!!"

Ohh, scary. Now the Demon Lord's army *definitely* sees me as an enemy.

"Arwf. *(Actually, it seems like you'll be the one receiving vengeance first.)* "

"...?!"

Carmilla finally senses the danger. She automatically turns her attention to the direction my nose is pointed—at the nearest hole in the wall. That, however, is the exact *opposite* direction she should be concerned about, and Garo, who has crept up behind her like a black bolt of lightning, latches her teeth onto Carmilla's arm—the one holding onto the young lady—and rips it off.

"Grwl. *(Don't make me say it again. The Fen Wolves will devour you even after death.)* "

Carmilla and Garo's clash lasts an instant. Garo decides not to deliver a follow-up attack on the now-one-armed vampire, instead jumping over to us, with Lady Mary's pajama-clad body held in her mouth.

"Woof! *(Nice one, Garo!)* "

"Grwl, grwl... *(My king, it is well that you are safe...! I am terribly sorry for my late entrance...)* "

"Arwf, arwf. (Don't be. It's because of you that the young lady is okay. Thank you. Wait, look at you! Why are you all beat up?!)"

I couldn't tell before from her black fur, but Garo's legs are dripping with blood.

"Grwl... (No particular reason...)"

Uhh, actually, there must be a very particular reason.

"Mew. (I'll just use some healing magic on it.)"

"Grwl... (Nahura? I'm sorry. Thank you...)"

After jumping onto Garo's back, Nahura covers Garo's body with a soft light.

"You're that Fen Wolf...! I mopped the floor with you, and you're telling me you're still alive...?"

"Grwl, grwl. (Your mistake was hating me, dirt-covered as I was, so much that you didn't turn me. And now I've repaid the favor.)"

We've rescued Lady Mary. Carmilla is gravely injured, having lost her left arm. The skull I think is Lich probably can't even fight.

The tables have turned.

"Arwf. (If you want to surrender, I'm still willing to listen.)"

"Ho, ho-ho-ho..."

Carmilla, head still hung, begins to laugh.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho- hope you didn't actually expect me to surrender. Did you?!"

She stands up, and a torrent of mana erupts around her, and we have to brace ourselves against the gust of wind.

"Fine... I don't need any hostages. Sorry, Uncle. I'm killing all of them right now."

Carmilla's severed arm regenerates instantly. After clenching a fist to test it, she glares at us.

Oh, shit. She's going berserk. The killing intent in her eyes almost makes me pee myself.

Her golden hair stands on end as her eyes flare up like red flames and her nails extend into the shape of sickles.

“This is my final plan. It wasn’t a coincidence that I chose this particular night to challenge you.”

Carmilla’s mantle flutters, and she puts strength into it as though she were going to grab hold of the moon floating in the night sky and take it.

“Tonight is the full moon! The night of the full moon grants vampires the most additional strength! As I am now, I would rival even the Demon Lord! Don’t you dare think I’m weak just because I’m a schemer!”

Blood-scarlet mana swirled, erupting from Carmilla’s shadow.

“Mgh!! This is bad! That amount of mana... It’s even more than I have!”

What? Wait, she’s so strong even *you’re* scared, Len? Well, damn. Didn’t expect that.

“I’ll take care of you small fry afterward! You, however, King of the Fen Wolves—*you* I vow to kill!”

Wait, what?! She’s singling me out?! I’m the biggest pacifist here!

Why do you want to attack an innocent white puppy? That’s animal abuse!

Without thinking, I jump back as before my eyes, Carmilla swiftly takes flight.

“Now I know for sure that ridiculous attitude of yours was all just an act to deceive me! I will not underestimate you any further!”

“A-arwf... (*Um, no, this isn’t an act. It’s how I always am...*) ”

“You won’t lull me into a false sense of security this time! I’ll use everything I have to kill you!!”

The ten nails sprouting from Carmilla’s hands sweep vertically, horizontally, in every direction, to slash me apart.

“Haaahhhh!!”

And then she kicks, planting her heel right in my stomach.

I crash through the crystal palace, blasted away from the lake entirely.

“Forbidden Magic: Blackblood Funeral Armaments!!”

Jumping out of the palace to follow me, Carmilla deploys a magic circle in midair.

From several layers of complex circle patterns, giant blades come forth. Distorted spears, made from something that looks like black blood. Several of them appear at the same time, firing toward me as I continue to hurtle through the air.

All of them stab into me, shoving me along the ground like a meteorite crashing down.

“I’m not finished yet!!”

Even more weapons are summoned from the deployed magic circle. Buried in the ground now, I’m helplessly exposed to the rain of attacks.

A horrifying number of giant weapons made of black blood pierce me, sticking out of me like I’m a pincushion.

“And this is the end!! Maximum Forbidden Magic: Darkness Heavycrash Prisonhammer!!”

A huge black sphere appears above Carmilla’s raised hands. Every last drop of her mana seems to be packed in that massive black lump of bloody mana as Carmilla bends over backward, turning.

“Diiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiie!!”

The humongous black sphere moves slowly, but I’m pinned in place and unable to move; it presses down on me, crushing me, trying to swallow me whole. The immense mass of black blood flattens, creating enough destructive potential to change the lake’s very landscape.

“Haah... Haah...! ...How was that? That was everything I had. On moonlit nights, I am the strongest of all in the Demon Lord’s army. Not even a hair is left of you now. You’ll have plenty of time to regret opposing me in hell.”

Carmilla, breathing raggedly, is confident of her victory.

Hmm. What should I do? I'd feel bad being the wet blanket with her so happy about this.

I really am worried as I look out of the crater and up to Carmilla, laughing at me from on high.

Uncaring of my hesitation, though, winds blow around the lake, and the dusty smoke covering our surroundings clears.

"Wha... I...?! How...?!"

Carmilla is so shocked it's like her jaw is going to pop off and hit the ground.

"Arwf? (*Umm, I'm, well, I'm sorry?*) "

I'm utterly unharmed. I took the brunt of some insane attacks there, but none of them even hurt. In fact, Len biting me would hurt more than that.

I shake myself off, getting rid of the dirt clinging to me.

"Grwl, grwl. (*Heh. Carmilla forgot one very important thing. The same thing that allowed me to survive...*) "

Wow! A convenient explanation, delivered at a convenient time.

"What... What do you say I've forgotten...?!" Carmilla comes back sharply.

"Grwl, grwl. (*You still don't understand? The Fen Wolves are progeny of the moon. We receive even more of its protection than you vampires do. And for the one who stands higher than us all, our king, Routa, his powers are amplified dozens of times! You never stood a chance from the beginning!*) "

"Wh... What?!"

"A-arwf?! (*Wait, what?!*) "

"Why are *you* surprised, beloved? This concerns your own body."

Well, I was just thinking I felt in top physical shape today. My fur is all glowy now, too.

"That... That can't be... That was everything I had, and it was ineffective...?!"

So she knew she'd gotten twice as strong as normal, but then her enemy ends up ten times stronger than that? That's incredibly unfair. Even though she's an enemy, I feel bad for her.

"Arwf. (Well, you were the one who said she wanted to go all out. Seems like you're out of tricks now, so it's our turn this time.) "

Carmilla starts to panic upon sensing my heightened mana. "W-wait, just a moment! If...if you lay a hand on me, I will order all the elves in that village to commit suicide!"

"Oh, but I've already knocked all those elves unconscious."

"Wh-what?!"

"Mew. (Not only the elves, too. Lady Len beat up everyone you turned. I can't believe her total lack of subtlety would come in handy at a time like this. I guess you never know!) "

"A... A plan, I need a plan—"

"The crafty schemer drowns in her own scheme, as they say."

Actually, if you ask me, I'd say it was just bad luck. All we did was physically destroy her plans through brute force.

"I refuse to believe that I, the vampire princess Carmilla, would ever lose to these lowly beasts...! It's not right...!"

Carmilla pulls at her hair, then charges in one last-ditch effort.

"Arwf. (Well, I told you to surrender a bunch of times already. Any more than this and you wouldn't be able to plead extenuating circumstances, so—) "

I take a deep breath, then eject all my pent-up frustration at once.

"Garrrrrrwwwllll!!! (I don't care how many of you there are! I will not forgive anyone stealing a master from her pet!!) "

"N-nooooooooooooooooooooo!!!"

My full-strength barf beam envelops the charging Carmilla and wipes her, and the entire crystal palace behind her, off the face of the lake.



Epilogue

"Arwf... (Sheesh. That was a long night...)"

We're currently walking back to the mansion after settling the score with Carmilla.

In other news, Bal carried out Garo's orders to a tee, protecting Shiro and Kuro and hiding in the forest. Deciding one is not fit for a battle and focusing on hiding oneself and others is the kind of veteran move I'd expect from Bal.

As for Shiro and Kuro, despite having gone through some scary stuff, they're still sound asleep. Seeing the little snot bubbles coming out of their noses was more than enough to make me smile in spite of myself. I definitely can't let the young lady see their overwhelming cuteness. I feel a greater threat to my position from them than from any enemy.

"Grwl. (We will be taking our leave, then.)"

Garo is bringing Ururu back to the village, and Nahura will be tagging along so she can go around caring for the wounded.

"Grwl, grwl. (We wish to sincerely thank you for saving us in our time of need.)"

"Woof, woof. (And thank you for helping save the young lady. I want to come and see Shiro and Kuro again soon, too.)"

"Grwl. *(Yes—my daughters and I will look forward to your visit.)* "

Garō bows her head, then leaves to go deeper into the forest with Bal and the others.

Speaking of people who are still fast asleep, my own master, Lady Mary, is still sleeping. Only she could keep on dozing away after all that commotion. She's got the toughest nerves around.

Still, despite everything that's happened, the young lady was never wounded, and everyone at the mansion is safe. I think we can consider this case closed.

I have to say—how dare they come after me, one after another, to threaten my peaceful pet life? Demon lords, heroes, battles for the fate of the world... Go do them somewhere else. Please.

"Squeak. *(Well, they do say everything comes in threes.)* "

Len says something terrible as she brushes the young lady's hair out of her face.

"Arwf-rwf. *(Ha-ha-ha. That would be ridiculous. It would never happen.)* "

...Right? It wouldn't, would it?

"Squeak, squeak. *(In either case, you would never lose no matter who came along. In fact, you may as well go straight to defeating the Demon Lord yourself.)* "

Well, I obviously don't want to. Why would a pet dog ever fight the Demon Lord? That would be insane. That's a job for a real hero to take on.

So maybe, Hero, you could do some actual work. Go protect world peace instead of heaping the trouble on me. Protect my life's peace, too, while you're at it.

I don't know where you are, Hero...but I've already taken care of things twice, so I really need you to take the wheel next time. I got reincarnated into a dog so I wouldn't have to do any work, after all.

Sometimes I feel like thanks to that airheaded POS goddess resurrecting me as this Fenrir thing, events have been heading in a strange direction. Not to worry—I'll stubbornly turn the wheel back on course toward the happy pet life I was meant to have.

"Arwf. *(Isn't that right, young lady?)* "

"Mmm... Together forever... Routa..."

That's right! You and I, together forever!

I snuggle against the young lady, who clings to me even as she sleeps, and walk slowly down the path back to the mansion.



After Routa and the others left, there was a small bat flapping unsteadily near the now-quiet lake.

"Kee, kee! *(I can't believe it... I can't believe they'd even beat me that easily...!)* "

"That's why I told you, Miss Carmilla, that our opponent was a terrifying one...", grumbled the skull, sighing, gripped in the bat's feet.

"Kee! *(You didn't do anything, Uncle, so be quiet! Or else I'll drop you!)* "

"P-please do not do that. Nothing will come of us having a falling out."

Carmilla and Lich had been defeated by Routa, but they both stubbornly refused to die. At the end Carmilla had made it look like she'd lost it and attacked, but she'd actually created a shadow of herself and used it as a decoy to escape. It was very on-brand for her to do something like that, given her propensity for calculation.

"Kee... *(We can't do anything against that thing... I hate to say it, but his strength might actually exceed the Demon Lord's...)* "

“For now, let’s build up our forces and wait for the other generals to awaken. Thankfully, there is plenty of leftover mana in this area.”

The crystal palace had been destroyed, but most of the mana holding it together was still drifting around the lake.

“The ultimate destruction magic the Fen Wolf King fired, especially, scattered excess mana into the surroundings. If you and I gather it all back up, we should be able to recover much of our strength.”

“Kee... *(Yes... As immortal monsters, our immortality is our true strength. Just you watch, Fen Wolf King. We’ll take our revenge on you one day...)* ”

After their opinions were aligned, a gust of wind suddenly blew through.

“Kee?! *(What’s this wind?!)* ”

She was unable to resist the winds with her weakened bat wings, and she and Lich were both scooped up into it.

“I’m sorry, but that plan won’t work.”

It was a person, controlling the little whirlwind with a fingertip, sitting on a staff. The woman looked exactly like the kind of witch who would appear in fairy tales.

“I’m quite sure I’ll be using the mana here, too, for my own magic...just like I have been for over a thousand years.”

She brought her face closer to the captured Carmilla and smiled meaningfully.

“Kee, kee?! *(Wh-what?! What are you talking about?! Who the heck are you?!)* ”

“You... You were there, too—the witch...! Yes, your name was...Hecate...! You said you’d be using the mana, *too* , didn’t you? Then were you the one who stole my graveyard as well...?!”

The two trembled in the presence of the mysterious witch. She possessed a different sort of dreadfulness from the Fen Wolf King. Maybe this was what prey caught in a spiderweb felt like.

“As for you two... Well, it seems you’re naught but shells now, sapped of all your strength. But I cannot simply leave you two to your own devices... Ahh, I have a good idea.”

The witch put her index finger to her chin as she thought, before her face broke into a smile, as though she’d just thought of a good plan.

“I’ll make you both my familiars,” she said, activating a spell with one hand.

“Kee, kee?! (What?! Don’t be stupid! Some random elven witch wannabe could never make generals of the Demon Lord’s army such as us...into...familiars...?) ”

The end of Carmilla’s sentence trailed off.

Thanks to the spell the witch had activated.

“Kee, kee?! (What—what is this?! It’s such a complex subordination spell...! And it’s tougher than me, a vampire?! How many years do you have to train to come up with such a barbaric, awful thing...?!) ”

“Curse... Curse you, witch—you are much older than your looks would imply, aren’t you...?! How many thousands of years have you lived—”

“Oh, hush now.”

Still smiling, the witch cast the spell on them.

““M-mgyaaahhhhh!!””

Two shrieks reverberated in the moonlit night.



After the night is past, everyone gathers in the mansion’s hall. It seems we’ll suddenly have more people working here. That’s how they prefaced their summons to us this morning, anyway.

“How strange. I don’t recall drinking last night, but I don’t remember *anything* of yesterday... Why was I sleeping outside...?” mutters Zenobia to herself. It must be an

aftereffect of Carmilla's sleeping spell. It's okay—just forget about it.

"May I have your attention, everyone?"

Papa, standing on the stairs in the lobby, claps his hands.

"I apologize for the suddenness, but I was only introduced to them today myself. I can't exactly deny a request from Dr. Hecate. I want you all to teach these ones about the work you do here."

The ones he is referring to are a pair of servants.

"Thanks to Lady Hecate's introduction, I will be working here as of today. My name is Richmond."

"I... I'll be working here as of today, too, also by her introduction, as an apprentice maid. My name is Mircalla."

One is a butler whose monocle suits him well. He's an older man, but his eyes as he looks at me are strangely sharp.

The other one is a blond maid who looks very impertinent—in fact, the double-sided updo hairstyle practically screams it.

"...!"

For some reason, the maid glares sharply at me, too.

Wait, what? Have our relationship points gone into the negatives at our first meeting? Seems like she'll be a tough one to win over.

"Squeak? *(Isn't it normal for humans to be scared of a giant Fen Wolf like yourself being in their mansion?)*"

Well, that's not really how it feels to me. If I had to guess, I'd say their stares are dripping with hatred.

"Arwf... *(I can't help but feel like I've seen them somewhere before...)*"

Hmm. Maybe I'm mistaken. It's almost like I just saw them yesterday...

As I continue to watch her, they both turn their cheeks away in the same moment.

"All right, new recruits! We're getting started on your training right away, so follow me!"

The greetings must be over, because Betty, the energetic maid, brings them away.

“Darn it. If not for that subordination magic, I would not have to face this humiliation...!”

“We must not be hasty. For now, we must bide our time. We must endure until the Demon Lord’s seal is undone, Miss Carmilla—erm, Mircalla.”

They’re mumbling things to each other in low voices, but I can’t hear because of some wind blowing in from the window.

“All right, everyone, do your best again today!”

““““Yes, Master!””””

Papa goes up to the second floor for his work as everyone else in the mansion returns to their respective jobs.

The only ones left are the young lady, who still has a little bit of time before her morning studies, and I, who have no need to work.

“Routa, Routa, what games should we play today?”

“Woof, woof! *(I don’t know. How about we play the napping game?)* ”



Having run all over the place all night long, I'm super-sleepy.

"You want to play fetch? Okay!"

"Woof, woof! (I didn't say that! But you seem happy about it, so it's totally fine with me! I'll play along just like a pet should!)"

The young lady breaks into a run, and I follow her out to the garden.

Five minutes later, I lie in a heap, done in by the summer heat. What I wouldn't give for some shaved ice...

Afterword

Good morning, evening, and afternoon, woof!

It's been a while! Looks like we were able to meet again! Yahoo! I'm happy!

I'm currently writing this in September, and the lingering summer heat is still quite harsh, but the season may have become very chilly by the time volume 4 hits store shelves.

Please be careful not to catch a cold. In addition, I have a cold at this very moment. (Par for the course.)

Let's get right into it. I have two announcements to make.

The first one is—yes! *Woof Woof Story* is being adapted to manga! We did it!

The one taking charge of the adaptation is Koikuchi kiki, an up-and-coming manga author and illustrator!

While it stays faithful to the original work, the content has ended up being *thick*, with many nice additions, so even those who have read the novels will be able to enjoy it!

The adaptation will also have an original manga drawn for it *and* come with a bonus comic on the inside of the cover—and the result is a product with lots to enjoy.

I also got to work on a short-form novel, and I decided on a story from when Routa was little, about the day he first arrived at the mansion. That will be in there, too, so I hope you enjoy it.

Also, this manga casually contains some amazing food scenes, so if you read it on an empty stomach, it might have you writhing about in murderous rage. The power of the illustrative medium unleashed is too much. I want to eat some of old man James's food, too (rolls around on the floor)!

I hope you enjoy *Woof Woof Story* and its bringing together of the fluffy Routa and a simple, innocent young lady in manga form as well!

I'm sure you're wondering about the release date, but I heard it will be a little before this volume, so it may already be on bookstore shelves. If you like, please pick it up the next time you're there.

My other announcement is that I, Inumajin, have, for the first time in my life, done a signing.

Several bookstores will be having signed copy giveaways as well as signed promotional material giveaways (though applications are already closed). Search those bookstores out if you'd like.

If you find one, please say something to the clerk like, "Hey, you jerk, show me the signed stuff." (I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. I'll post the picture on Twitter the next day. And also, I'd be overjoyed if you gave me a follow. I'll be running all over the place.)

Finally, I'd like to extend my gratitude to those who helped me.

Kochimo, who has drawn everything very well despite the sheer number of new character designs for this volume.

K, my editor, who makes the author sweat about deadlines.

Koikuchi Kiki, a cram-before-the-deadline comrade.

All the people in the editing department. The designers. The test readers. The businesspeople. The bookstore workers.

Many others (too many to list), and you, for purchasing this book!

Thank you so, so much!!

Now then, I'm running out of available pages, so I'll be taking my leave for today.

Let's meet again in volume five!

2019 Inumajin

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